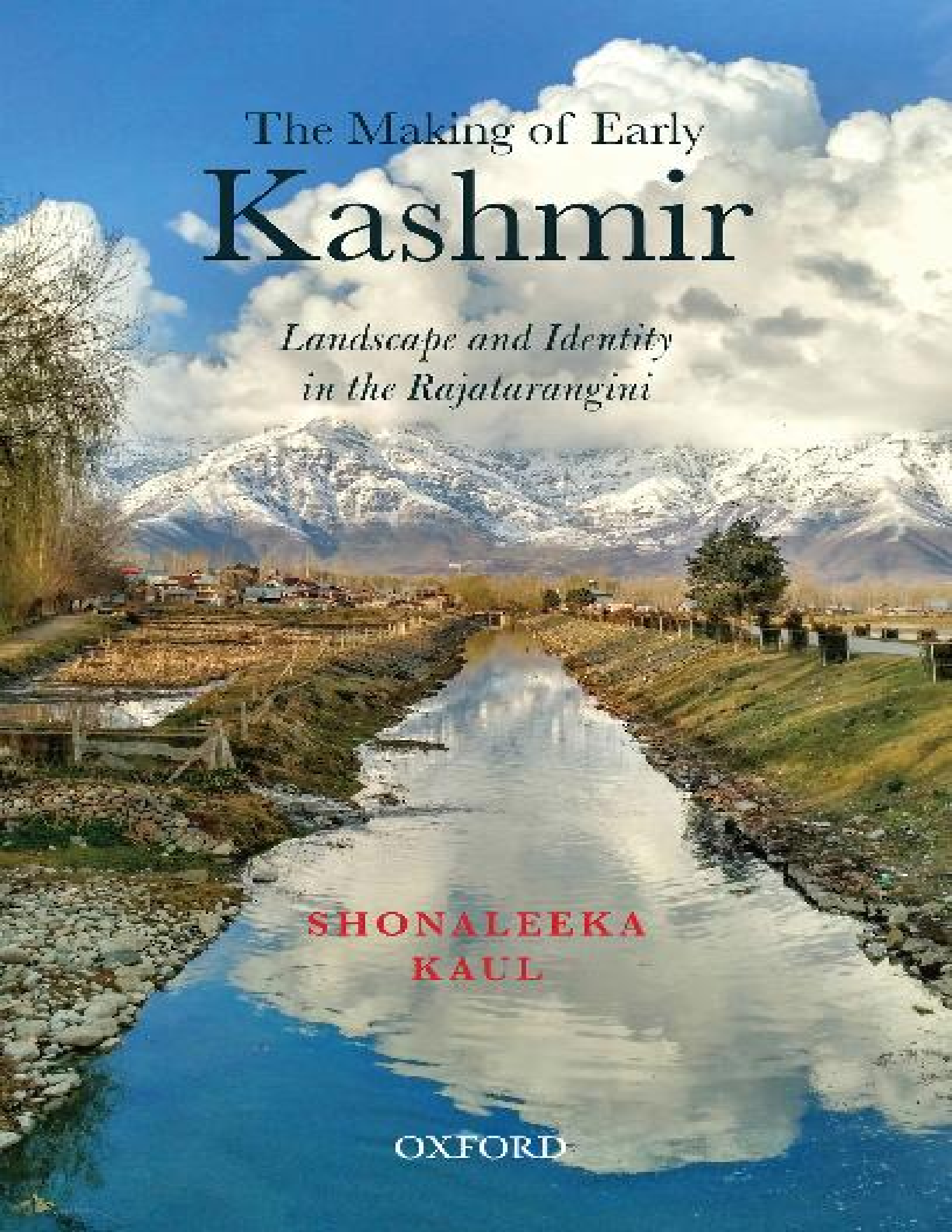
The Making of Early
Kashmir
Landscape and Identity
in the Rajatarangini
SHONALEEKA
KAUL
OXFORD

The Making of Early Kashmir

‘Despite its long-acknowledged singularity, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* has found singularly little sustained analysis. In fact, Shonaleeka Kaul’s is the first book devoted to the great twelfth-century work on Kashmir. Carefully argued and beautifully written, Kaul’s study takes seriously the work’s claim to be *kāvya*, literary representation that distils reality through the imagination, and shows the particular kind of history it produces, one that constructs a space through time as well as plotting time in space. An empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated work.’

—Sheldon Pollock, *Arvind Raghunathan Professor of Sanskrit and South Asian Studies, Columbia University, New York, USA*

‘Professor Kaul provides an engaging and stimulating reading of Kalhana’s important text. She argues convincingly that far from being isolated from the rest of the sub-continent, the Kashmir of the *Rajatarangani* was a lively participant in a wider cultural, economic, and political world.’

—Phyllis Granoff, *Lex Hixon Professor of Religious Studies, Yale University, New Haven, USA*

Modern adoption of the text [Kalhaṇa’s *Rājataraṅgiṇī*] for writing Kashmir’s early history is essentially a reproduction of the text, except for the ‘methodological’ pressure of attempting to separate the ‘grain’ from the ‘chaff’, the ‘factual’ from the ‘mythical’…. Shonaleeka has dared to depart from this approach by treating the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, as it should be treated, not as a quarry for randomly selected historical information, but as a *kāvya*, in which lie embedded varieties of cultural ingredients of the valley. Shonaleeka’s multidisciplined approach to the text has resulted in a fascinating exploration of the making of the special identity of early Kashmir…

—B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *former Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

The Making of Early Kashmir

Landscape and Identity in the *Rajatarangini*

SHONALEEKA KAUL

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Śrīkṛṣṇārpaṇamastu

Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather
Pandit Prem Nath Kaul
Proud and pious Kashmiri and lover of history

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PREFACE

A work of history should perhaps begin by telling its own history. I first picked up Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* in 2005 to help get through the long months that separated the submission of my doctoral thesis and the conduct of the viva voce for it. My PhD had been on Sanskrit *kāvya* (highly aesthetic poetry and prose) and it was to read another *kāvya* that I turned to the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. In retrospect, this intuitive approach was propitious. For, swimming against the tide of its enormous reputation as a work of objectivist history rather than poetry, reading the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* then, and again more carefully in 2012–13, I went on to argue that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was indeed a *kāvya* first, and *thereby* perhaps history.

A second, instant observation on my first reading of the text has also stood the test of 12 years of time to remain the centrepiece of my thinking and analysis on the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* that is presented in this book. This is the conviction that ethics is the fulcrum of Kalhaṇa's literary and historical vision. This was, however, not something that most of 200 years of modern scholarship on the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* had believed—they who had looked upon the moral, didactic, and rhetorical tendencies of the poem as an eminently disregardable indulgence typical of convention-bound, brahmanical Sanskrit poets. Though the preaching of the ancients may have little interest for intellectuals of today, to deny the centrality for those poets of this preoccupation with a critical idealism and call to action is, to my mind, to miss the moving spirit and *raison* of an entire thought-world.

From my resumption of the laborious study of the sprawling *Rājataraṅgiṇī* from scratch in 2012 to the completion of this book in 2017, a significantly wider dimension gradually attached itself to the project. This drew on the realization that Kalhaṇa's efforts may have been directed at generating not only a history or temporality but also, perhaps even more significantly, *a place* for history/time. This place was Kashmir, and the writing of its history by Kalhaṇa, I argue, was tied up with creating a homeland. Implicated in this process were not only the sacred geography of the land and a model of prescriptive politics but also an understanding of regional selfhood that aspired to transcend the narrow cultural limits of vernacularism.

This book then became an investigation of larger, discursive questions that possess, I would like to believe, an enduring primacy across the humanities and social sciences as also a striking resonance for contemporary Kashmir and the world. These questions

are: What is history and in what modes may we receive it? How does a land become a homeland? And how are cultural identities formed? That the three questions are in fact intertwined and inform one another is perhaps at the core of the answers to them that this book proposes. Howsoever obscured, the ancient past cannot be erased or wished away. It shapes a land and a people in intrinsic ways, it shapes their collective self. An identity divorced from history may descend into delusion.

In the course of delivering many lectures based on my readings in Kashmiri history, in Delhi, in other parts of India, and in academies abroad, I discovered a disturbing reality. Indians knew so little about Kashmir; no doubt the result of its complete and shocking absence from school and university curricula. The world knew even less, and perhaps only the tales of violence and strife that have been doing the rounds in certain diplomatic and academic circles for the last 30 years. However, and undoubtedly the saddest of all, many young Kashmiris in the Valley today, reared on a schizophrenic narrative, seemed to know or care the least about the rich origins and legacy of their land. Though hardly written with that object, it is hoped that *The Making of Early Kashmir* will go some way in forcing our collective attention back to the ancient history of a region that once spearheaded virtually all intellectual and cultural movements in the Indian subcontinent with trademark erudition and brilliance.

Conceiving, researching, and writing this book has been an exacting and exhilarating journey. I should like to acknowledge those who helped. The Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences awarded me the Jan Gonda Fellowship in Indology in 2014 that facilitated my access to the erstwhile Kern Institute Collection and the digital resources of the University of Leiden, The Netherlands. This laid the foundation for the wide scope and findings of what became Chapter 4 of this book. Two successive Humanities Research and Development grants from the University of Delhi, India, also aided my research.

Most of Chapter 2 was first published in 2014 in *History and Theory*, the iconic journal of Wesleyan University, USA, that earlier in the 1970s and ’80s carried the writings of Hayden White, among other greats. White was the philosopher-critic whose work substantively executed the literary turn in history worldwide, to which I too subscribe. I thank the journal editors, William Pinch and Ethan Klein, for their warm backing and this early vindication of what was/is a thoroughly revisionist hypothesis.

For providing all help and permissions with some of the images carried in this book, my gratitude is due to Vinay Kumar Gupta, Shailendra Bhandare, Iqbal Ahmed, Malcolm Todywalla, and Sandeep Rao. Chancing upon the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York’s wonderful new policy of cultural commons was a relief; most of the images of early Kashmiri art used here belong to their public domain collection.

Professor Sheldon Pollock’s work with Sanskrit literature has laid the ground for reading early Indian texts in the challenging and wholesome new ways that these

resoundingly deserve. Though *The Making of Early Kashmir* appears to critique some of his seminal formulations, the latter can in fact be credited with fuelling those thought processes of mine. His warm encouragement over the years and his example of one who was not afraid to theorize early Indian cultural phenomena have perhaps spurred my own discursive and theorizing propensities.

I would like to thank Professor Phyllis Granoff for her support and high standards ever since I got to know her during my tenure as the Dinakar Singh Distinguished Lecturer in South Asian Studies at Yale University in 2007. As then, so now, I benefit from her scholarship and kindness.

Different aspects of this study were presented in a lecture series at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, France, at the *Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud*, the *École Pratique des Hautes Études,* and *Monde Indien et Iranien.* I thank Professors Ines Zupanov, Caterina Guenzi, Osmund Bopearachchi, Edith Parlier-Renault, and Nicolas Dejenne for their warm invitation and reception to my work. For the opportunity to speak at the University of Rome-Sapienza, Italy, I thank Professor Rafaelle Torella and my lovely friend, Carmela Mastrangelo. At Leiden, I received the affection and hospitality of Professors Jan Houben and Saraju Rath for which I am grateful.

Closer home, Professors B. D. Chattopadhayaya and Kunal Chakrabarti have kept me buoyed by their faith in my abilities. Professor Madhavan Palat encouraged the writing of this book with warmth and generosity. Professors T. K. Venkatsubramaniam and Kesavan Veluthat have shown a kind interest in my work and welfare over the years. Raziuddin Aquil and Manu Devadevan have encouraged and cheered me on. I acknowledge the latter also for furnishing me with interesting books out of thin air! I thank my publisher, Oxford University Press, India, who asked for this book four years before it was written and then patiently waited for it.

Some of my former students from 14 years of teaching in the University of Delhi, prior to moving to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, last year, have cheerfully assisted in this book. A very special thanks to Shambhu Nath Mahto for beautifully rendering the maps, that too at short notice, and tirelessly undertaking the many rounds of technical revisions that came to be required. Amit Chhikara has been there for me and mine in various ways over the last ten years and has avidly awaited the completion of 'the Kashmir book'. His brother Sumit chipped in with his graphic design skills at crucial moments. Tanmay Kulshreshtha provided many an elusive bibliographic reference.

The Making of Early Kashmir is dedicated to the memory of Pandit Prem Nath Kaul (1892–1979), not only because he was my grandfather but because he was, by all accounts, the epitome of the best Kashmiri values and intellect. In addition to authoring a series of commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, well past his retirement he sat down to

pen, quite remarkably, a voluminous autobiography that he kept updating over the next decade of his life. In itself today a rich ethnographic commentary on 19th- and 20th-century Kashmir, his autobiography is, moreover, prefixed by a formal history of Kashmir in the *longue durée* written by him. It is as if Pandit Kaul knew that the life-history of any Kashmiri properly began with, and belonged to, the history of the land itself. Although I have argued in this book that the ancient Kashmiri yen for history-writing was of a piece with pan-Indian literary tendencies, this striking display of a very personal respect for history, from Kalhaṇa to Pandit Kaul, may represent, I dare say, a continuity special to Kashmiris.

Pandit Kaul's youngest son and my beloved father, Sumer Kaul, would have been the happiest to see this book written. A veteran journalist for over fifty years, his passionate pieces on the situation in Kashmir that appeared in the national dailies he helmed (*The Indian Express*, *The Observer*) or later wrote columns for (*Hindustan Times*, *The Statesman*, *The Pioneer*) right up till his death in 2008 were my first education in the modern history of Jammu and Kashmir. So were his many fond memories of growing up in the Valley.

My husband, Nachiketa, has more faith in the history that I write than I may have myself! He has watched this book take shape over short bursts of activity interspersed with long periods of guilty fallow. Usha-ma and my sister, Devika, remain a source of affection. Jim, my puppy, has kept me alive ever since he waddled into my home five blessed years ago. Kalli brings comic relief, unbeknown to herself. Buddoo and the rest of my dog-rescues give me things to look forward to every day. I thank God for all of them and for *The Making of Early Kashmir*.

September 2017 Shonaleeka Kaul

NOTE ON EDITION, TRANSLATION, AND DIACRITICS

Sanskrit verses from Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* quoted in this book follow Marc Aurel Stein's critical edition of the text, *Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅgiṇī or Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, volume 1, reprint edition 1960, and Ranjit Sitaram Pandit's translation based on Stein's edition, *The River of Kings*: *Rājataraṅgiṇī, The Saga of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, reprint edition 2004. At a few places I have preferred to use my own translation.

Diacritical marks have been used exhaustively for transcribing the Sanskrit. However, it was thought prudent to dispense with these in the maps and in the text for modern place names (such as Mathura, Banaras, Haridwar, Kashmir) or well-known rivers and mountains (such as Ganga, Chenab, Himalayas) or languages named frequently (such as Sanskrit, Prakrit) or words in common use today (such as brahmana). Diacritics had to be entirely dropped from the cover and title of this book in the interests of online access and searchability.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Through his fingers glided the years, months, weeks, and days, returning again and again without end as in the cycle of existence.

—Kalhaṇa

Time is a constant melding of past, present, and future, a mode of stretching which produces a kind of simultaneity in difference.

—Henri Bergson

The old world, such as it was, has been lost; a new one has yet to be won.

—T. N. Madan

This book is a cultural history/anthropology/geography of early Kashmir. The reason it dons many hats is that the phenomena it investigates, the questions it raises, and the perspectives it employs do not belong to any one discipline. They do all relate, however, to the broad field of culture. Culture has been understood in its essence as shared meanings and values. And after the recent 'cultural turn' across the social disciplines, it is understood to be discrete and irreducible to other spheres of human life such as the economic and the political. This book is an attempt to identify and interpret the values and meanings associated with the region called Kashmir from its origins until the 12th century CE. It does so chiefly through the medium of an iconic textual representation composed by a Kashmiri in 1148 CE, Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. *The Making of Early Kashmir* is in a primary sense, therefore, a work of textual criticism. It explores early Kashmir as a literary imaginary constructed in a major text.[1] However, that is only the beginning of what this book is about. Synoptically speaking, it is a study of temporality, spatiality, and identity in early Kashmir through a range of discursive and material practices.

The *Rājataraṅgiṇī*,[2] an epic Sanskrit poem running into nearly 8,000 verses and narrating the story of Kashmir's royal dynasties over more than a millennium, deserves to be the subject and medium of such an investigation for it is one of Kashmir's earliest articulations of, and engagements with, a regional self-awareness. This is not the reason, however, why this text has received the rousing scholarly reception that it has over the last two hundred years. As will be explained in detail in Chapter 2, Kalhaṇa's

magnum opus, when translated by European Orientalists in the 19th century, was believed to be the first and only work of true history to be found in all of Sanskrit literature and early India. Given that such an interpretation implied that early Indians otherwise were singularly bereft of a sense of history, this celebration of the text was in fact deprecation of an entire civilization. It was nonetheless embraced by Indian historians and philologists throughout the 20th century in what can perhaps be described as a scramble for coevality with the Western world and its disciplinary parameters.

That the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* did not call itself history but rather quite unequivocally traditional Sanskrit poetry, *mahākāvya* or *prabandha*, and behaved like the latter, complete with its heavy use of rhetoric, myth, and didacticism, was seen as something of an inconvenience and aberration, a disruption and compromising of its otherwise fine display of objectivist qualities such as factuality, impartiality, and causality. Dividing the text against itself thus, the modern scholarly exegesis of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, by and large, ended up transforming it as also suppressing, what this book will argue are, its authentic representational tendencies and rich semantic possibilities. *The Making of Early Kashmir* is about rehabilitating the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* to its own literary culture and thereby accessing the wealth of meanings pertaining to early Kashmir that it produced and preserved.

Today a part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Valley of the river Vitastā (Jhelum) was, for at least 1,500 years before Kalhaṇa, the kingdom or *maṇḍala* of Kashmir. This book attempts to understand the discursive and material processes by which it emerged as a historical culture region. Re-examining the relationship between language and expressions of space in premodern India is the entry point for this volume. Arguing for moving beyond the influential binary of 'cosmopolitan' and 'vernacular' literary cultures authored by Sheldon Pollock, this book draws attention to how the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, a classic literary representation of regional space, is in the 'cosmopolitan' Sanskrit and not in the vernacular tongue, Kashmiri. It thereby provides an important exception to Pollock's hypothesis as well as defies any formulaic understanding of how premodern South Asian literary cultures related to the spaces they represented. It argues that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is a splendid example of how Sanskrit *kāvya* adopted and adapted local Kashmiri motifs, locales, and content to a translocal poetics and stood in as the pre-eminent register of regional literary expression. In the process, it inaugurated a critique of local politics as well.

From this position, the book seeks to expand the ways in which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* has been looked at—from political history to intellectual and cultural history that entails the production of knowledge and meaning. It is then a case for revisiting the scope of *kāvya* studies as well, for this book shows on the strength of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* how *kāvya* was not just an inert receptacle for history but a cognitive

and discursive mode of representation that actively constituted and mediated the past for its audiences. This form of history was coterminous with the poet's vision of the land and its lineages. It is this vision that the book attempts to decode, this discourse that it seeks to interpret, to raise for the first time questions of landscape and identity for early Kashmir.

Before I explain how the book goes about this, it would be appropriate to say more about the relationship between regional history, culture, and representation to make explicit the premises underlying this exercise. A region does not express or possess intrinsic meaning. Meaning is given or constructed through discursive practices, chief among which is textualization performed by social actors such as Kalhaṇa. A land coming into meaning is the birth of a region, in particular a culture region. So regions are produced not just by material practices on the ground such as the drawing of boundaries or erection of gateways but, perhaps more powerfully, by cultural practices of representation.

A sustained representation inaugurates a discourse on the region, the power and efficacy of which derives from whether it is experienced as authentic by the community which it claims to represent and in which it circulates. The fact that Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* gave rise to at least three sequels by other Kashmiris over the next four, tumultuous centuries of Kashmiri history and was still regarded as the foremost representation of the land by Abul Fazl when the Mughals descended on the Valley in the late 16th century decidedly attests to the persistence of the power and deemed authenticity of Kalhaṇa's discourse. Perhaps the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s fame and authority would have been confined to intellectuals; nonetheless, to what was owed this prestige and enduring authenticity?

I suggest that it is only when a discourse is embedded in a semantic–conceptual universe that is shared by the community that it can attain currency. For Kalhaṇa and his representation of Kashmir, that shared cultural universe or framework by which people made sense of the world around them drew from the pan-Indic Sanskrit episteme. In particular, Sanskrit's master texts and genres, such as *itihāsa*, *purāṇa*, *kāvya*, and *śāstra*,[3] and their ethico-philosophical traditions relating to *nīti* (principles), *dharma* (righteousness/duty), and *karma* (action), were the intertexts that furnished for early Kashmir the criteria for evaluating knowledge as relevant and true. However, in a little-noticed fact, Kalhaṇa's poem was also a foray into folklore and local oral traditions about the land, seen in the frequent references to *janaśruti* and *kathā* (people's sayings and stories) as the source of verity, and in the invocation of popular memory as witness to Kashmiri history via the formula *adyāpi smaryate janaiḥ* ('it is remembered by the people to this day'). This is discussed in Chapter 3. This fact also illuminates Kalhaṇa's choice of *kāvya* for being a versatile and flexible mode that could entertain the mythic and the folk alongside classical and conventionalized

registers of imagination and representation. The *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s authority perhaps stemmed from this apposite combination, among other things.

That notwithstanding, reading Sanskrit culture out of a Sanskrit text may appear somewhat circular. However, as explained in the chapters, we do not get literature in any other endogenous language from early Kashmir.[4] Sanskrit spoke for Kashmir. On a different yet related plane, Kalhaṇa's elite background, evident not least of all in his choice of a highly learned Sanskrit genre, has been indicted by some scholars as shaping his historical assessments.[5] On a close reading of the text, it appears that Kalhaṇa's ethical sensibility far outweighed his social ideology. As readers will find, it is not so much a socio-ritual orthodoxy as a politico-moral orthopraxis that is the evaluative criterion for Kalhaṇa, and he does not necessarily conflate the two as modern scholars are wont to do. Instead, though certainly and unsurprisingly a conservative traditionalist and a monarchist, he at times is seen reworking social distinctions in order to foreground ethical ones. Thus he lampoons and abuses figures of ritual or political authority for being pompous, debauched, or treacherous even as he celebrates and valorizes some commoners for their talent and the socially insignificant, such as a prostitute or a cook, for their loyalty or bravery. Everywhere, Kalhaṇa's constant refrain or vantage, howsoever rhetorical, seems to be people's welfare (*prajānupālanam*); his chief tirade is against persecution of the people (*prajāpīḍanam*), and, in the highly judgmental piece of poetry that is the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, Kalhaṇa spares no one except the pure minded (*śuddhadhī*, *sat*, *manasvī*).[6]

Further, though the son of a former minister by the name of Caṇpaka who was possibly dismissed from the court of the Kashmiri King Harṣa,[7] it is noteworthy that Kalhaṇa himself does not appear to have been at any king's court (albeit he speaks at length and fairly penetratingly about the reigning monarch of his time, Jayasiṁha, the last in the line that he documents). This seems to set Kalhaṇa apart from those of his peers who were court poets. It may account for the remarkably personal, sentimental, and individualistic takes on view in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and the acerbic and hypercritical tone that cuts through Kalhaṇa's poetry.[8] It also has implications for the kind of extra-royal locales and, therefore, audiences that his composition, which is so steeped in political culture, may have circulated amidst. Of course, the reading communities of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* cannot be known for certain, but a description in a contemporary *kāvya* from Kashmir (Mankha's *Śrīkaṇṭhacarita*) of a literary conclave or *goṣṭhī* gathering at the house of a poet-laureate Alaṁkāra in Srinagar for a poetic performance may well provide a clue.[9] Further, rather than being read privately as a modern novel might, it is possible that Kalhaṇa's marathon composition was excerpted and its highly vivid content related orally to audiences at such events,[10] true to a traditional rendition of a *śravya kāvya* (poetry to be heard).[11]

The Making of Early Kashmir is divided into three segments that deal with what I suggest are the text's treatment of three different aspects of a region: time, space, and a form of space–time, if you will. While the first two concepts appear to be self-explanatory dimensions of apprehending the history of a region (though these are problematized by the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, as readers shall see), by space–time I refer to a framework capable of representing movement across spaces through time, in other words, a region's external linkages in the *longue durée*. A word about each segment.

The first segment, or Chapter 2, seeks to re-interpret the nature of the text, critiquing traditional scholarly opinion for persistently confining itself to the question of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s empiricist historical qualities, in the process rejecting the vast rhetorical and figurative component in the poem and inducing flawed oppositions between poetry and history. This chapter emphasizes the need to look instead at the metapoetics of the genre of *kāvya* to which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* belongs, and take seriously the special ontic and epistemic claims it makes on behalf of the *kavi* (the poet) and his extraordinary access to time—the past, present, and future. Surely this is the main reason behind Kalhaṇa's choice of *kāvya* for writing Kashmir's tale of time. Combining this insight with the theory of 'narrativity', I observe that a certain organizing principle, rather than mere seriality, holds together in a unifying logic the multitude of disparate kings in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. I identify that organizing principle, which brings an order of meaning to the sprawling account, as a model of orthopraxis or righteous conduct according to which Kalhaṇa classifies and narrativizes—not just narrates—Kashmiri kings from the earliest till the poet's own time. I further argue that the same ethical paradigm served as Kalhaṇa's mechanism for generating and structuring temporality.

Much as historians privilege chronos as the chief interest of their discipline, bereft of topos time is rendered abstract and valueless. Indeed place is time made visible.[12] Operating with the understanding that spatiality is as integral to historicality as time, the second segment, Chapter 3, is devoted to teasing out how the text transformed an abstract space into a specific place, namely Kashmir. Using the analytic of 'landscape', I identify certain practices of place that the text employs to elaborate a region and a homeland. These included naturalistic and symbolic means. The chapter charts and analyses the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s representation of the physical features of the land of Kashmir and the range of cultural constructions put on these through myth and memory. In other words, it views the land as landscape: geography overlaid with narrative that generated a rootedness in the land. So the interpretation of myth in this book is not as history's primeval other, but as a special kind of historical strategy in so far as it inscribed and memorialized historical places and also stitched them to time. For a

place with a sense of self so fashioned, reclaiming the past, or writing history, was a means to strengthening the self. And given that landscape is manifested narration,[13] the key to the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s portrayal of Kashmir as a deeply sacred geography was also, I argue, to provide a synergistic backdrop against which Kalhaṇa's ethicized political commentary could unfold. Geography and polity were brought together to essay an instructive contrast. Finally, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s vivification of Kashmir as a landscape is shown in this chapter as a primary site for the intersection of the local and the universal in the literary constitution of Kashmir's regional identity.

The third segment, Chapter 4, adopts the lens of 'connected histories' to formulate the geo-cultural location of early Kashmir and situate her in relation to the cultural configurations bounding her. In particular, it focuses on the relationship between the region and the supra-region, India, which has its resonance again in the vernacular and cosmopolitan literary traditions coming together in early Kashmir. How does the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* understand this location? Can it be seen as a literary response to liminality and a peripheral and acculturated identity for Kashmir vis-à-vis the Indic cultural zone? Or were other dynamics at work? And what do non-textual imaginaries testify in this regard?

Towards this end, Chapter 4 first maps Kashmir's cultural encounters with other regions near and far, which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* refers to in abundance, and measures, as it were, the role these may have played in Kashmir's emergence as a culture region from very early times. Then it also steps out of the text to examine other crucial markers of cultural identity and mobility: archaeology, art, script, and language from the early historic up to the early medieval period in the Valley and, selectively, in Gāndhāra, Gilgit–Baltistan, Jammu, Ladakh, Himachal, and Punjab. Howsoever limited, this to my knowledge, is the first such interpretive piecing together and joining-of-the-dots, as it were, of the material-cultural history of not just early Kashmir, which otherwise suffers from massive gaps and silences, but the West Himalayan zone and the subcontinental North-West all together. Juxtaposing the testimony of this range of cultural markers and the traditions they attest suggests a new way in which to regard questions of region and regionality in early Indian history, one that takes us away from static and unilinear conceptions such as 'centre–periphery' and 'acculturation', towards an appreciation of broad cultural flows and movements of astonishing reach. This and other theoretical positions that emerge from the studies contained in this book are enunciated in the conclusion, that is, Chapter 5.

While works on medieval, modern/colonial, and contemporary Kashmir may abound, serious discursive scholarship on the ancient past of this troubled land has been inadequate, so that historical analysis of modern Kashmir, too (Mridu Rai, Chitralekha Zutshi), has tended to operate in virtually a vacuum, sometimes naturalizing the vitiated present. Existing histories of early Kashmir, such as they are, have by and large relied on a literal, if not verbatim, duplication of the procession of royal dynasties and events figuring in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (Francis Younghusband, P. N. K. Bamzai, James Ferguson), never rising above the face value of the text's contents to an exploration of its symbolic and discursive universe. While empiricist studies (Harold Wilson, Aurel Stein, George Buhler) tended to make of Kashmir something of a curiosity and quaint exception in harbouring a historiographical impulse, later specialized works (Rafaelle Torella, Bettina Baumer) on the philosophical innovations in early Kashmir, though profound, by centring on Tantric Śaivism or *dhvani* aesthetics, tended to create the impression of Kashmir as a mélange of a few cultural exhibits, rather than a complexly constituted culture region. While some (B. K. Kaul Deambi) did go descriptively into aspects of Kashmir's external linkages, these were seen as offshoots of her 'genius' and her 'contributions' to the world, rarely analysed or theorized in terms of implications for Kashmir's own regional identity.

Indeed, while historically thin notions of a peculiarly pluralist identity ('Kashmiriyat') have been devised for medieval Kashmir down to Independence, and claims of a regional identity based on a single religion for contemporary Kashmir are proferred, there is little understanding in mainstream scholarship of the emergence of *early* Kashmir as a culture region (as different from a geographical region) and the many material, linguistic, literary, ethnic, ritual, artistic—and not only religious—processes that constituted it as such. One likes to believe that recent work in the West (Yigal Bronner, Lawrence McCrea, Walter Slaje) is attempting to rediscover ancient Kashmir through the medium of Sanskrit literary theory but there, too, coming from philology, a fuller integration of the literary with the historical–anthropological perspective, as also a consideration of the interface of Sanskritic with vernacular culture, is at best a project in progress.

This book locates itself within this nascent recasting of the gaze on early Kashmir but does so using fresh hermeneutical and comparative–historical methods and perspectives. It asks new, interdisciplinary questions of a comprehensive range of discursive and material representations of early Kashmir in the hope of defining the region both spatially and ideationally. *The Making of Early Kashmir* does not claim or seek to be a comprehensive analysis of all of early Kashmiri culture. Its chief ambitions are: first, putting out a critical reinterpretation of a literary classic of iconic stature, in the process defining anew the problem of history and historicality in premodern South Asia. And second, bringing clarity to our understanding of the genesis and cultural

composition of a region long subject to scholarly and political assumptions and clichés, if not neglect.

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1 This is not a compilatory analysis of all possible references to Kashmir in all manner of early Indian texts and foreign accounts. Such studies already exist in numbers.

2 Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was succeeded by sequels also titled *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and composed by Jonarāja, Śrīvara, and Śuka, respectively, from the 14th to the 16th century. In this book, however, *Rājataraṅgiṇī* refers to only Kalhaṇa's work.

3 See Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of these early Indian literary genres.

4 See Chapters 3 (section on Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in Kashmir) and 4 (section on Language).

5 R. C. Majumdar called out Kalhaṇa's 'Hindu didactic belief in karma' as a 'failing'. See 'Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature' in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C. H. Philips (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 22–4. Romila Thapar suggested Kalhaṇa endorsed land grants to brahmanas and acquiesced in their revolting against the king out of a softness towards the caste. See 'Kalhaṇa' in *Historians of Medieval India*, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1983), p. 59. It should be noted that Kalhaṇa records grants made not only to brahmanas but also to Buddhists. He also pilloried such brahmanas who went on impetuous hunger strikes to put pressure on the king. The brahmana revolts that Kalhaṇa praises are those that are against a king whom Kalhaṇa himself regards as a wrongdoer. See Chapter 3, this volume.

6 See Chapters 2 and 3 for a detailed discussion.

7 The relationship is mentioned in the colophons of *taraṅga* or Book VIII of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (hereafter RT). The story of Caṇpaka is given in RT VII.954.

8 This cynical and strident aspect to Kalhaṇa's political poetry also resonates with the sense of alienation that Yigal Bronner has identified in the poetry of his compatriot, Bilhaṇa, who was however a poet at a Deccan court in the 11th century. 'The Poetics of Ambivalence: Imagining and Unimagining the Political in Bilhaṇa's *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*', in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*, eds Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, pp. 493–524 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

9 For a cogent discussion of reading communities in early medieval India, see Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

10 Of course scribes, who made copies of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, and commentators would have read in private the entire text ultimately.

11 *Śravya kāvya* and *dṛśya kāvya* (poetry to be seen, or drama) were two modes of consuming Sanskrit literary compositions that are mentioned since the *Nāṭyaśāstra* circa 2nd century CE.

12 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*: *The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 179.

13 Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso Books 1989), p. 260.

CHAPTER TWO

Poetics and the Past

Questions of History in Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅgiṇī

History as a discipline today has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of appearing scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal.

—Hayden White

For scholars of India, Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (*River of Kings*) needs no introduction. The 12th-century narrative of the royal dynasties of Kashmir from the earliest to the author's own time, composed in nearly 8,000 verses spread over eight *taraṅga*s (sections/books), is a *kāvya* or *prabandha*, that is, classic epic poetry in Sanskrit. It has been better known, however, as history rather than poetry—in fact the first work of history proper in all of Sanskrit literature, we are told—ever since parts of it were translated into English by Harold H. Wilson in 1825.[1] Later Georg Bühler and his pupil Marcus Aurel Stein, who produced its critical edition in 1892 followed by a full English translation,[2] were fatefully drawn to the significance of the text for similar reasons, namely its overt deference to chronology, assigning dates in different eras for the ascension and end of every regime; its alleged quest for objectivity, mirrored in the poet's call to impartiality; and its display of causation, attributing events to explanations—features that made it, to their mind, stand out in a literary culture otherwise infamous for its alleged poverty of historical sense. Much later, in the 1960s, Indologists such as A. L. Basham and R. C. Majumdar were saying the same things in praise of the text. See, for example, this representative statement: 'Even a modern historian should have little hesitation in ranking Kalhaṇa as a great historian.... [for his] correct appreciation of *the true ideals and methods of history*' [emphasis added].[3] Such definitive statements reinforcing Wilson's early characterization became canonical for later generations of Indian historians.

There was just one problem in this glowing appraisal: all these scholars found themselves stumped by *other* aspects of the text that did *not* fit their idea of what history should be—aspects which they then had to disown and describe as 'failings' and 'imperfections'. Thus Stein thought the rhetoric and didactic parts of the

Rājataraṅgiṇī that were in *kāvya* style were simply unconnected with the narrative proper, which was historical, while Bühler indicted the resort to legend and myth as rendering the chronology of a large part of the text 'valueless' and its author suspect.[4] Following suit, despite christening Kalhaṇa 'a great historian', Majumdar spoke of his 'very defective' method consisting in the inclusion of mythical or legendary kings, 'a blind faith in the Epics and Puranas', a belief in witchcraft and magic, explanation of events as due to the influence of fate 'rather than to any rational cause', a general didactic tendency inspired by Hindu views of karma, and 'mere display of poetical and rhetorical skill'.[5] Based on this vantage both he and Basham maintained that the first three *taraṅgas* were less credible than the last five. In 1983, following their lead, Romila Thapar taught us to distinguish between 'earlier books', where supernatural causes and fate were important, and later ones that reflected, we are told, 'the maturity of Kalhaṇa's historical thinking'; a separation that continues to inform modern readings of the text. Thapar also dismissed Kalhaṇa's moralism and didacticism.[6]

Philologists and historians who dominated the study of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* thus ended up fragmenting it, setting up some parts of it against other parts, as it were, obfuscating rather than elucidating the nature of the text as a whole. Moreover, all aspects of figuration proper to a poetic discourse were deemed extraneous and detrimental to the essentially 'historical' substance and intent of Kalhaṇa's enterprise that were presumed antithetical to the poetic. Interestingly, though entirely inspired from modern objectivist notions of history in the West, rather than from any indigenous or ancient approaches to treating of the past, the underlying belief in the opposition of 'factual' (true) history and 'fictive' (false) literature was new even to 19th-century Europe, and belied the practice in Classical (let alone Indian) antiquity where history was considered but a form of fine literature with no prejudice to its truth value. Then came Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), arguably the most influential post-Enlightenment historian. The Rankean or positivist turn in European historiography, with its stress on facticity, objectivity, and scientific method, imprinted itself on world historians, additionally through the agency of colonialists such as James Mill. Mill, as early as 1817, in his notorious *The History of British India*, launched a scathing attack on Indian literary and historical traditions for not measuring up to their Graeco-Roman or Judeo-Christian counterparts. Positivism mingled with imperialism to end up downgrading and delegitimizing indigenous narratives of the past.[7] An ironic product of the same thinking was the isolating, essentializing, and exalting of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a unique exception in Sanskrit literature—at the cost, of course, of its rhetorical and legendary features as traditional poetry. In other words, in being isolated as a flawed exception in all of Sanskrit literature, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as history was both the creation and victim of an intellectual approach that sought to simultaneously appropriate and undermine a traditional Sanskrit text. This interpretation stuck and, intriguingly, came to be

embraced across the board by scholars of different ideological persuasions ranging from Orientalist to Nationalist and Marxist over the next 150 years and counting.

What is more, notwithstanding a relatively recent surge of interest among Western scholars in the text's literary qualities, the old history hypothesis, with all its epistemic contradictions and errors of category, has yet to be comprehensively confronted, and remains the dominant paradigm through which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is taught in history departments across universities in India. It therefore deserves to be reviewed here before any attempt can be made to supplant it and explore anew the rich potential of this iconic text, especially because such a review will help clarify some of the contentious but key aspects of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, such as the recourse to rhetoric, myth, and didacticism, that facilitate, I argue, the emergence of an alternative, cohesive perspective on its character and function.

THE HISTORY HYPOTHESIS OR *THE HISTORY THAT WASN'T*

A close look at both the main arguments and objections of the history hypothesis shows that though persuasive at first glance, they are easily refutable and strangely self-contradictory. First, the ascribed merit of assigning dates and sequence. While there is no doubt that Kalhaṇa's punctilious dating of reigns is remarkable, it is not altogether unprecedented, since *vaṁśāvalī*s or traditional royal genealogies produced in Sanskrit (and later in other Indian languages), not to mention the Puranic genealogical lists, did much the same in what was obviously a long-standing, far-from-novel documenting practice.[8] Further, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was not the first such chronologically ordered account even within Kashmir but apparently among the last few in a long local tradition (*āmnāya*) by its own testimony,[9] a fact little commented upon. Its uniqueness merely on account of its deference to sequential dating is therefore overstated.

That apart, placing a premium on linear dating of events ignores the fact that while all narratives necessarily manipulate time by rearranging it to configure a meaningful pattern, there can be different modes of configuring temporality in different times and cultures, and even within a single culture, including distinctly non-linear modes.[10] Thus you have the influential cyclical concept of time contained in the Puranic system of *caturyuga* ('four ages'), which calibrated the entire spectrum from cosmic to anthropic time in a pattern of four, recurring mega-periods (*kṛta*, *tretā*, *dvāpara*, and *kali yuga*s) signifying ascent and decline, albeit of a moral kind. Instructively, apart from the many *Purāṇa*s, which are vast, encyclopaedic texts produced in Sanskrit from the 3rd century CE onwards into the second millennium CE, this was the understanding of time deployed also by the Indian Epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, composed from circa 5th century BCE to 5th century CE, which belong to that genre of Sanskrit literature known as *itihāsa* that is generally understood to stand for 'history'. As such

the *yuga*s may well be regarded as an old and culturally popular choice of mode for rendering time. It is no surprise then that Kalhaṇa himself uses the *kaliyuga* as the basis of the dates he ascribes to the early kings of Kashmir. Yet this has been regarded as unacceptable by scholars, a show of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s 'blind faith in Epics and *Purana*s', and of its reliance on 'legendary and fictive events', such as the *Mahābhārata* war that is traditionally believed to separate the *dvāpara* from the *kali yuga*.[11] Clearly, operating here is a rather inconsistent logic that faults a text for invoking a well-established, if mythical, chronological system of its time and culture, even as it applauds it for its concern for chronology in the first place.

Underlying this conflicted evaluation of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is the premise that the mythical, much like the poetic, is always fictive and false, rather than a meaningful rendition of truth values about the past. This is why mythical aspects of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, which tend to cluster in the 'early' *taraṅga*s, have not been given their due because they have had the label of narrow history to contend with. After all, our disappointment with literary myths may have more to do with the particular, *a priori* nature of truth historians have been searching for than with the kind of truth the text deploying myth is interested in conveying. As Paul Veyne has perceptively observed, myth is not about the 'real' as truth, but about *what was noble as truth*. Therefore, the standard of truth in myths, and their value to the narratives that preserved them, derived from something other than the verifiable.[12] Myths in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* based on local Kashmiri legends (*kathā*) about wrongdoing kings and their cities that were catastrophically destroyed by the anger of tutelary deities (*nāga*s), or about the origins of the land of Kashmir in an act of the great gods as told by the *Purāṇa*s display precisely such a meaning and function in Kalhaṇa's ethicized political commentary.[13] The least that is warranted, then, is a shifting of the historian's gaze to align with that of the poet's, particularly when the text encourages us to transcend the distinction, as we shall see. The inclusion of mythic traditions, whether from the Epics, the *Nīlamata Purāṇa* (Kashmir's regional *purāṇa*), or Kashmiri local legends, would be perfectly natural in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s own cultural context where those traditions were in wide circulation and well regarded as authentic sources of hoary knowledge. Moreover, far from being a lapse in critical judgement, their inclusion served a purposive, didactic function which was crucial in the text's scheme of things.

The other quality rather fondly ascribed to Kalhaṇa by modern historians, seeking perhaps to mirror their aspirational self-image, is that of objectivity or impartiality. This is supposed to be captured in the following much-cited verse from Kalhaṇa's preamble:

> *Ślāghyaḥ sa eva guṇavān rāgadveṣabahiṣkṛtā |*
> *bhūtārthakathane yasya stheyasyeva sarasvatī ||*[14]

In Kalhaṇa's description of the talented poet's speech (*sarasvatī*) that is rid of attachment or aversion (*rāgadveṣabahiṣkṛtā*) when recounting past realities (*bhūtārthakathane*), modern scholars have read a manifesto for the ideal historian who supposedly renders his subject matter with dispassion and neutrality. This is premised, however, on a circular assumption that Kalhaṇa *is* referring to a historian at work; Majumdar explicitly says Kalhaṇa *asks the historian* to act in such manner.[15] In fact, the verse, read in context with the verses preceding it, is clearly about the *kavi*, the talented poet (*guṇavān*); there is no other referent in these stanzas. This has led Walter Slaje to argue that it can be read in consonance with the *kavi*'s premier project of generating a state of equipoise—the *śānta rasa* that Kalhaṇa professes[16]—through his composition, which, according to contemporary *kāvya* theory articulated by none other than Kalhaṇa's compatriot, Abhinavagupta, required the experiencing of a similar poise and detachment (*vairāgya*) by the poet himself.[17] The term *stheya/stheyasy*, which is used for the poet/the speech of the poet, could then refer to one who is calm and unwavering rather than impartial.

In any case, we now know that objectivity—'the truth out there as it is'—as the foundation of the historian's enterprise is open to questioning, even 'a preposterous fallacy', as E. H. Carr called it, given the central role of subjective and variable inference and interpretation in the reconstruction of an essentially unobservable past.[18] What is more, significantly, in ironic disputation of his stated aesthetic dispassion, calm and detached are the last things Kalhaṇa is when narrating the good or evil deeds of Kashmiri kings and queens and the plethora of other actors the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* portrays. Kalhaṇa's deep personal involvement in the events and actions he narrates and, more importantly, passes judgement on and moralizes over is stark from even a cursory perusal of his composition, and has been widely noted by scholars as a trademark cynicism. Indeed there are passages in the text where this cynicism rises to the crescendo of unmistakable denunciation and contempt for certain dubious characters, expressed even in obscene or scatological terms, which is highly unusual in Sanskrit poetry.[19] At such moments espousing ethics seem to have weighed more with Kalhaṇa than abiding by aesthetics. As we will see, this is no happenstance but a defining part of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s agenda.

The other trait approvingly attributed to the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* by the history hypothesis is its tendency to supply causes for most events or occurrences that it reports. Implicit in this favourable valuation of causation is the faith that it displays in rationality. Such an expectation of rationality is, however, immediately undercut in the case of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* via the common criticism, from the same historians, that Kalhaṇa frequently invoked fate and suchlike forces 'rather than any rational cause'. Therefore, it is not just commitment to causality that is being expected of Kalhaṇa but a particular

brand of empirical rationality, failing which this supposedly historical trait loses meaning.

Now, such an understanding of historical causality and its corollary, the criticism of fate and so on as explanations, overlooks the complexity of a traditional causal vision. Fate (*bhāgya*) in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is deployed in multiple contexts, in 'earlier' and 'later' *taraṅga*s alike. Inscrutable providence is seen as a causal device often in response to situations where the poet is obliged to explain the inexplicable, such as an illogical act by a protagonist, namely King Jayāpīḍa's sudden change of character from an enlightened ruler to an oppressive one, which leaves Kalhaṇa with no answer but to invoke fate.[20] In such cases, fate also functions as exclamation and not just explanation, serving the poet's complex expressive needs. Thus, Harṣa's coup d'état and takeover of the kingdom, literally overnight, brings on a comparison with fate itself for the 'amazing deed' (*mahādbhutaḥ kṛtaḥ*) he performed as only fate could.[21]

Most of all, fate, in the form of the fruits of karma in a past life, is used as a didactic device, a source of blessing or punishment according to good or bad deeds of individuals or Kashmiri society as a whole. Thus, the death at long last of the cruel and tyrannical king Mihirakula is said to be 'owing to the dawn of the merit of the subjects' good actions' (*prajāpunyodayaiḥ*) while the plunder of Kashmir under rapacious officials of queen Diddā is regarded as 'the result of its accumulated evil actions (*duṣkṛtaiḥ*)'.[22] Thus karma and fate serve as an opportunity for Kalhaṇa to ethicize and add a moral accent, which is, I argue, his chief interest. On another plane, fate is also a particularly apposite device for a tale of time, since it resonates with a connectedness or continuity of the past and present, and as such is profoundly causal, if not apparently so.

Thus as we have seen, the history hypothesis tends to collapse under its own contradictions. It pays compliments to Kalhaṇa with the right hand, only to take them back with the left. It credits the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* with qualities and faculties that are, in the first place, not central to the concerns of the text itself or the literary culture to which it belongs, yet also critiques it for not quite living up to them. At the same time it suppresses, not to say undermines, such tendencies as are recurrent and clearly important to the textual scheme of things. I therefore urge reclaiming the poem from the hegemonic but troubled understanding of it as history—only to perhaps restore it ultimately to a more integral notion of historicality that is sensitive to the literary, is internally consistent, and is true to the contents of the text rather than to externally levied criteria. One way to do this is to rehabilitate the text to its originary literary culture and invest in its vision. In other words, to view the text as what it itself claims and proves to be, namely a *kāvya*. *Kāvya* is highly aesthetic poetry or prose (including drama) characterized by the use of indirect and figurative language (*vakrokti*, *alaṁkāra*) and the evocation of essentialized emotional states (*rasa*).

THE LITERARY HYPOTHESIS

A different line of enquiry in the West has relatively recently begun to advocate the importance of literary qualities of premodern Indian texts in ascertaining their historicality. Among the first to argue for giving credence to Sanskrit literature's 'special modalities' for processing history was Sheldon Pollock. In a path-breaking piece on Mīmāṁsā and the problem of history, he perceptively spoke of an 'eccentricism' of the Sanskrit tradition that consisted in a cultivated indifference to or denial of historical referentiality in favour of a professed transcendence of discourse.[23] In his opening thoughts Pollock also suggested the possibility of rethinking the question of historical consciousness in India on the basis of the then-recent writings on narrative and temporality by Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, and David Carr, a goal that conforms to my own here. However, returning to his main argument, despite the validity of the observation that some Sanskrit genres (including classical *kāvya*, as I too have argued elsewhere) try to escape limits of time and place, Pollock's theory, in attempting to explain Sanskrit literature's peculiarity, tended to perhaps re-state its ahistoricity. Such an explanation was also not useful for decoding a text such as the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* that is overtly referential to past matters and their chronology; it tends therefore to repeat the poem's isolation from its literary culture as professed by earlier historians.

Substituting genre (history or literature) with 'texture' (history within literature), V. Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam famously argued in 2003 for the ability of some late medieval South Indian textual genres to deploy an internal differentiator in the form of a (shift to a) particular literary register or narrative style that, in its evocation of 'factuality', was diagnostic of historical intent.[24] This initiated a new line of enquiry that was enthusiastically received in several quarters on account of the blow it struck for indigenous textual cultures. It was also critiqued, especially by Pollock, for suggesting that literary style above all else was capable of being a necessary and sufficient index of truth claims in premodern India.[25] Moreover, given the premium placed in this work on 'direct, unadorned, straightforward' fact being historical, the assertion elsewhere in this work that 'history was not a matter of verisimilitude *tout court*' and that realism made for weak historiography, betrayed a lack of clarity in this formulation on where the factual stands in relation to historical truth and representations of reality.[26] Stemming directly from this confusion was their summary dismissal of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a work of history—oddly alleging 'an absence of factuality and a reflective organization of materials into a readable understanding of the past' in the text.[27] Indeed, if the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was shorn of all factuality, one wonders why the question of its historical status, which scholars have been considering for two hundred years now, should ever have arisen. As for the 'absence of a reflective organization of materials', this chapter will not only

demonstrate this to be erroneous but also argue that it is precisely in the poet's organizing vision that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s historicality may lie.

Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam's contention, though difficult to accept, shows how the matter of whether the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is history or not is far from settled, and continues to engage scholars regardless of their attempting to distance themselves from it.[28] Ironically, working within their broad contours of privileging the search for a particular poetic style as a historical marker, Whitney Cox has recently arrived at a conclusion that is the very opposite of theirs, namely that via the occurrence of a 'terse, tense' narrative register, especially in the later parts of the text, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* does indeed reflect a historical consciousness.[29]

Though articulated elegantly, the substance of Cox's historicity, however, lies in an all-too-literary logic as 'the ways that this kind of Sanskrit verse is able to capture the ebb and flow of the world's congenital instability by rendering itself dense and rich enough to capture something of it'.[30] (Note again, how Cox's conception of a historical register consisting in 'dense and rich' verse contrasts with Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam's emphasis on a 'direct, unadorned, straightforward … matter-of-fact tone' constituting historical texture.) It suggests a formal mimesis as the substance of Kalhaṇa's engagement with history, and that too operating mostly in those parts of the text where the said 'instability' is seen to heighten. This reading does not quite explain what the rest of the text *not* composed in Kalhaṇa's intensified register was meant to be doing, that is, what we are to make of truth claims made therein.

Perhaps more urgently, other Sanskritists such as Walter Slaje and Lawrence McCrea have returned to indigenous Sanskrit categories of generic analysis, for instance, *rasa kāvya*, to gauge the nature and purpose of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*; but while the former sees the historical aspect as subserving and subordinate to aesthetic objectives, the latter argues for vice versa.[31] More on this later, but it is instructive to note here that simply substituting empiricist with aesthetic categories of enquiry into the historical character of the text has not resolved the picture, only complicated it.

Among the handful of early scholars who recognized the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as primarily a *kāvya*, such as Bernhard Kolver, the tendency was to infer Kalhaṇa's subjectivity or less-than-historian-like qualities from the text's status and content as a poem, in effect returning to the fallacy of a divide between the literary and the historical.[32] Slaje is perhaps the first to suggest a viable rapprochement between these two aspects of the text. In his brilliant analysis, albeit only of the preamble which states the poem's objectives, Slaje argued for the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s pursuit of aesthetic and ultimately soteriological, rather than historical, ends. In other words, true to the contemporary theoretical understanding of *kāvya*, the evocation of the *śānta rasa* or state of equipoise, which in turn would facilitate the attainment of *mokṣa* or liberation, was

Kalhaṇa's main endeavour via the narration of the lives of Kashmir's kings past. Therefore, for Slaje, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s appeal to historical reality was a necessary means—but merely a means—to enhance, as only an appeal to verity can, the aesthetic effect.

Now, while sharing Slaje's emphasis on regarding the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a *kāvya* first, I differ from both him and McCrea by focusing instead on a different strand of *kāvya* poetics. I emphasize the genre's, as well as specifically the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s, self-understanding as not just a creative but a cognitive and discursive literary mode. At the heart of this mode lies the *kavi*'s claim to a privileged epistemic authority that cannot be ignored just because it is couched in convention. I do not only highlight explicit statements of this epistemic claim in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, and the wider world of Sanskrit literary culture to which it belongs, all of which point towards a conception of what can only be called a brand of historical constructivism attributed to poetry; I also argue that the claim can be fully redeemed against the totality of the poet's vision both of the past and of what constitutes true knowledge of it. This vision lies in the epic composition read right through, not just in the preamble, and it exceeds an aesthetic intent.

Hence I proceed with an understanding of the integrity of the text, not bracketing out mythic and didactic portions that arguably constitute the bulk of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, but viewing as a unity Kalhaṇa's use of myth, moral, rhetoric, and history—ingredients all of his discourse on Kashmir's past and present. At the same time, I identify a variety of tendencies within the text that suggest that crucial aspects of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s discourse on Kashmir have lineages in literary and philosophical traditions other than *kāvya*, which together partake of a universal normativity and inscribe a collective epistemology.

IS THE *RĀJATARAṄGIṆĪ* A *KĀVYA*?

In the colophons of his work Kalhaṇa designates himself as a *mahākavi* (great poet/composer of *mahākāvya*). He also pays full and handsome homage in his work to preeminent conventions of *kāvya* composition such as *rasa* (abstracted essence of emotions), *alaṁkāra* (figures of speech), and metre (he uses the classic *anuṣṭubh*). Moreover, his putative successor, Jonarāja, who composed a sequel to the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* in the 15th century, unequivocally described the original work as a *kāvya*.[33] In other words, there can be no doubt that for all contemporary purposes, Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was recognized as a *kāvya*.

For our purposes, however, *this* can be only a starting point, since *kāvya* is a complex category and the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a *kāvya* is even more complex; so, if the epic poem is treated as a stable and given entity, it will explain perhaps even less of its

dynamics than the history hypothesis. A close reading of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* shows that it is not a simple text but what may be called a composite type. It is a *kāvya* in form and spirit but draws heavily in content, slant or perspective, and even form on several other texts and textual traditions. Overall, this may be a situation marked by overlapping discourses and a self-reflexive, purposive intertexuality.

Some of this happens explicitly with Kalhaṇa citing upfront a list of texts (*granthāḥ*), probably all in verse, that constitute his reference point. For instance, the works of Suvrata, Kṣemendra, Helarāja, Padmamihira, Chavillākara, apart from 'eleven others' and, most importantly, the *Nīlamata purāṇa*. These have been typically characterized by modern scholars as a historian's 'sources'. In fact, they are better seen as intertexts since Kalhaṇa regards these as his 'predecessors' (*pūrvāḥ*) and positions himself as a legator to their works, at once emending and commenting on them as well as extending their work on Kashmir to its logical and, according to Kalhaṇa, more competent conclusion.[34]

Portentiously, intertexuality also operates unannounced in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, for a number of Kalhaṇa's postures and propositions are informed by other, pan-Indian Sanskrit literatures such as *śāstra* (prescriptive treatises on statecraft and law), *nīti* (political and moral parables), and *itihāsa* (narratives on the past), even as the basic fact of chronicling dynasties king by king is in the *vaṁśāvalī* (genealogy) tradition, as mentioned before.[35] Indeed, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* may be seen to migrate among these genres and *kāvya*.[36] Suffice it to sample but a few of the large number of examples of each type found across the text.

The invocation of *itihāsa* texts is easy to recognize since characters and incidents are directly named. Thus the lineage of Kashmiri kings who 'with their wits led astray from rectitude perform impure acts in their hurry to achieve selfish ends' is traced, in a manner of speaking, to Epic precedents such as the chivalrous Rāma murdering Vālin deceitfully in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the righteous Yudhiṣṭhira conniving in the dishonest killing of his preceptor, Droṇa, in the *Mahābhārata*.[37] Similarly, King Harṣa is compared to Duryodhana in being doomed to bring about the end of their respective dynasties.[38] Moreover, an entire episode in the victory expedition of King Meghavāhana is patterned exactly on the legend of Rāma parting the waters of the ocean to reach Lankā, whereupon Vibhīṣaṇa, 'the ruler of *rākṣasa*s', comes out to meet Meghavāhana, 'the ruler of men', just as he did for Rāma.[39] In these and other easy mythic pointers to the Epics, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was obviously and astutely tapping the culturally validated political and ethical tropes and resonances of which these texts are a storehouse.

The primary intertextual echoes in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* are in the nature of moral or political maxims and exempla (*nīti*) that are reminiscent of Sanskrit texts on

rājadharma (political philosophy) that circulated widely and enjoyed considerable influence, like the treatise on statecraft, the *Arthaśāstra* (composed 4th century BCE–2nd century CE), on the one hand, or the fablesque *Pañcatantra* (circa 5th century CE) and the anthology of wise stories and advice, the *Hitopadeśa* (circa 12th century CE?), on the other. Here are a few random examples that give a taste of such quips, all of which either led into or led out of episodes documented by the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, with a view to inducing a lesson or a comment from the anecdotes: 'Where the king himself abducts the wives of subjects, who else indeed will punish transgressions of moral law (*dharma*)?'[40] 'The job of a statesman is to conserve renown; acquisition of dominion is secondary … For a living being, like camphor by its perfume, is measured by its reputation even after its body is destroyed.'[41] 'Charity and courtesy win universal affection for the sovereign. Greed destroys both [affection and the sovereign]. Clouds reduce the glory … of a day in autumn to a mere reminiscence; so too greed in the case of kings.'[42] 'The unwise king who is devoid of discrimination and is unsophisticated like a brute beast does not take long to be ruined.'[43] 'Living in a sanctuary the Timi fish eats up its own species; the stork silently approaches and swallows the Timi; the hunter dwelling in the depth of the forest kills the stork. Each prevails over its victim by higher and higher skill in outwitting [others].'[44] 'What other opportunity for a display of courage for the village jackal than to approach the lion's den when the lion is embattled with the elephant?'[45] And so on and so forth.

My main point here is that the adoption by the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of injunctive perspective and matter from textual authorities or traditions of Sanskrit culture, of which we shall review more substantial evidence throughout the remainder of this chapter, was crucial to the shaping as well as framing of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s own message and philosophy. This should alert us to the generic open-endedness and absorbancy of *kāvya*. Also, needless to say, once this intertextual location and lineage of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is recognized, it qualifies the uniqueness imputed to it by modern historians. It also seriously questions that line of thinking that persistently looks to non-Indic central and west Asian traditions to account for the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s propensities.[46] In an important sense, *the Rājataraṅgiṇī did not so much depart from Sanskrit literary traditions as, in effect, bring them together.*[47]

METAPOETRY AND EPISTEMIC INSIGHT

What allowed and indeed inspired the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* to perform this feat of literary virtuosity? The answer may be found in a consideration of the metapoetry of *kāvya* generally and Kalhaṇa's poem specifically, which, in fact, confirms the characterization of the latter as a *kāvya*. *Kāvya* is essentially literature as art. However, as I have argued before, while *kāvya* may be distinguished by the highly aesthetic/ornamented

form of figurative language it uses, its objectives went beyond the aesthetic.[48] Among its stated objectives was *upadeśa* or instruction, usually about *trivarga*, that is, *dharma- artha- kāma*, in other words, the entire spectrum of human goals and activities divisible into 'piety', 'power', and 'pleasure'. From Bharata in the 2nd century who used the term *upadeśa* and Bhāmaha in the 5th who spoke of *vaicakṣaṇya* (understanding/expertise) to Bhoja in the 11th century who uses the term *adhyeya* (lesson), this contemplative–educative function of *kāvya* remained a constant refrain among rhetoricians.[49] Just how seriously *kavi*s took this mandate is evidenced by the self-image projected by Kalhaṇa and other poets such as Bilhaṇa and Ratnākara, not to mention influential theoreticians such as Ānanadavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Mammaṭa, Ruyyaka, and Bhaṭṭa Tauta, all of whom belonged to Kashmir just like Kalhaṇa and were broadly his contemporaries. For this group of litterateurs and intellectuals and others from the wider world of Sanskrit rhetoric who comprised the intellectual context of the composition of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, the *kavi*'s special insight was an article of faith.

Thus, the great Rājaśekhara in the 10th-century *Kāvyamīmāṁsā* speaks of the power (*śakti*) of true poets lying in their divine sight (*divyadṛṣṭi*) that enables them to perceive that which no one before them has ever seen. He also likened poetic power to spiritual omniscience.[50] Similarly, the 12th-century *Kāvyānuśāsana* of Hemacandra quotes the 10th-century Kashmiri rhetorician Bhaṭṭa Tauta, who was the famous Abhinavagupta's teacher, as saying:

> None a poet (*kavi*) but also a seer (*ṛṣi*). A seer is so called because of his vision (*darśana*), which is knowledge of the true nature of entities and their varied states of being. And it is because of his vision of the truth that the seer is declared … a poet. The conventional meaning of the word poet, for its part, is derived from his capacity for vision (*darśana)* as well as his powers of description (*varṇana*).[51]

Kalhaṇa virtually echoes this when in his preamble, in a show of metadiscursive reflexiveness, he speaks of the talented *kavi* being able to truly see (*paśyet*) everything knowable that exists (*sarvasamvedyān bhāvān*) by virtue of his intuition and creative insight (*pratibhayā)*, and how (somewhat circularly) this is proof of the poet's divine sight (*divyadṛṣṭitva kaveḥ*).[52] He thus claims for the poet a special ontic access to the reality of things, an omniscience that extended to things past (*bhūtārtha*).[53] As such, the world is stated to be in darkness without the illumining work of the good poet (*satkavikṛtyam andham jagattvām vinā*).[54] This is repeated by his second successor, Śrīvara, who calls *kāvya* the lamp (*kāvyadīpam*) that sheds light on past matters/realities (*bhūtavastuprakāśakaḥ*).[55]

Particularly the deeds of kings, Kalhaṇa insinuates, would be lost forever were it not for the poet who resurrects, vivifies, and embodies their glory (*yaśaḥ kāyaḥ*)

through his words, a self-projection that is exactly found in Bilhaṇa's *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* and implied in Ratnākara's *Haravijaya*.[56] Thus Kalhaṇa writes:

> Renowned [and mighty] kings would not even be remembered without the favour of the poet's work (*anugraham kavikarmaṇe*) that is sublime and to which we offer salutations.[57]

There can be no doubt that in these statements we find a concrete assertion of the epistemic authority of poets. But that is not all. In a strikingly constructivist approach to the past and to the pursuit of its knowledge, the poet is understood to be not just the 'knower' but even the 'creator' of the past. Hence Kalhaṇa calls him *kavi-prajāpati* or *kavi-vedhas*, that is, poet-creator.[58] He writes: 'Who else is capable of making visible (*pratyakṣatām*) bygone times except the poet-creator who can make delightful productions (*ramyanirmāṇa*)?' It should be noted that Kalhaṇa is merely repeating the understanding and usage in Bāṇa, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, and Kuntaka before him.[59] Here again, then, is Sanskrit *kāvya*'s belief in the poet's creative ability to make the unobservable past perceptible—the quintessentially historical function—and indeed a statement on the past itself so rendered as a construction or production (*nirmāṇa*).

Armed thus with complete authority over the past and over its 'true' nature and meaning, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* proceeds to instruct the present. Via the numerous morals and lessons with which the bulk of this composition is constituted, some evoking resignation, others pragmatism, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is moulded into a commentary par excellence. Hence, I believe, the tendency to moralize is the leading thrust of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and not some superfluity like Stein and Thapar suggested. Therefore, although Pollock, even as he argues for *kāvya* as a discourse of power, maintains that the didactic function was entirely subordinated to the aesthetic objective in *kāvya*,[60] I submit that on the evidence of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, the didactic is inseparable from the aesthetic; it is the combination that made *kāvya* so powerful a politico-literary phenomenon.

And thus, at the heart of the primary enterprise of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is the representation of Kashmir as a discursive political space mediated by an ethical paradigm, to which we now turn as the final part of my argument. We might note here that the coalescing of didactic and historical functions via poetry, articulated in no uncertain terms by Kalhaṇa, perhaps qualifies the formulation that in Sanskritic India '[history] is denied in favour of a model of "truth" that accorded history no epistemological value'.[61] As we shall see later, even as the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* projected a model of 'truth' that conformed to Sanskritic traditions, it derived its truth from, and located it within, a referentially adduced historical past. *Kalhaṇa's 'truth' was thus both transcendent and contingent*.

'THE RIVER OF KINGS' AS A FLOW OF EXEMPLARS

Governance and kingship in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* are evaluated according to certain moral principles with which Kalhaṇa frames his composition.[62] His ethicized commentary runs through the text, unifying his account in a moral logic. It is this literary unity of plan, this plot-structure as Hayden White would call it (discussed later), that characterizes the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a political and indeed historical narrative, not a mere seriality consisting in the enumeration of king after king, which is the hallmark of a (mere?) chronicle. This has, however, hardly been noticed because most modern historians have tended to dissect the text rather than consume it whole. Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, for example, spectacularly missed this aspect and, perhaps, *raison d'être* of Kalhaṇa's work when they charged it with being a 'pointillistic assembling of events' lacking a larger organizing or hermeneutical scheme.[63]

Kalhaṇa in fact declares in no uncertain terms the organizing principle of his vision by means of what can only be called an opening statement. In the first *taraṅga* he tells us:

> From time to time, due to the spiritual merit of the subjects, kings appear who organize a kingdom that is sunk deep in disorder (*dūrotsannasya maṇḍalasya yojanam kriyate*). Those who are intent on harassment of their subjects (*prajāpīḍanam*) perish with their families; on the other hand, fortune waits on even the descendants of those who reinstate order where there is chaos … this [is] the feature of each tale (*prativṛttāntam lakṣaṇam*)…[64]

Kalhaṇa ensures this is borne out king after king in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. He reiterates the point later in the fifth *taraṅga*: 'The dynasty, fortune, life, wife, the very name of kings, in an instant goes to perdition for those who do evil to the subjects (*prajāvipriya*).'[65] In a corollary he observes in the second *taraṅga*: 'Who is Lord Indra, what is the Creator Brahma and what the wretched Yama, God of Death, to transgress the command of kings who are pledged to righteous conduct? … Single-minded application in protecting the subjects is the sacred duty of kings (*prajānupālane nānyakarmatā bhūbhṛtām vratam*).'[66]

Ensuring these śāstric aims were a series of qualities: good conduct (*sadācāra*), righteousness (*sat*), generosity/liberality (*dākṣiṇya*), discriminating intellect that could tell right from wrong (*sārāsāravicāra*, *kṛtyākṛtyaviveka*) and which encouraged men of merit, character, and learning, and the will to enforce justice (*dharma*) and ensure absence of fear (*abhaya*) among the subjects.[67] Kalhaṇa thus lays out a highly prescriptive list of personal and political values that draw on a conception of moral order to which the king's commitment is expected. These values are plotted through a series of exemplars. This schematic organization of the text articulating the poet's ethicized vision is strikingly apparent when the text is viewed as the unity that it is and

its didacticism and rhetoric are not dismissed.[68] It is here that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* displays narrativization or the configuration of historical 'facts' around a plot-structure that endows otherwise random data with a unified structure and meaning, thereby rising above mere seriality.[69] Narrativity in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* embodies the poet's vision of the past, endowing that past with culturally sanctioned meanings that etched a profound understanding of historicity in early India.

For a pragmatic and critical poet such as Kalhaṇa, turning to the past involved more than merely seeking out a chain of ideal rulers in antiquity. Instead, the ethical exemplars that he identified in Kashmir's past often occurred in pairs, elucidating their comparative morality. Thus among the earliest you have King Vibhīṣaṇa II, insignificant in himself but on whom Kalhaṇa dwells at some length since the former 'through pursuit of the vice of sensuality (*viṣayadoṣa*)', 'transgressing bounds of discretion', coveted the daughter of a *nāga* and thus became 'the source of a series of misfortunes' for the people as the *nāga* wreaked devastating vengeance on the king and his entire realm.[70] Kalhaṇa somberly comments: 'Under the guise of protectors, such types of destroyers arise … now and then who unhesitatingly cause devastation [through] passionate lust.'

As if in purposive contrast, Vibhīṣaṇa is succeeded by his son King Siddha, 'that virtuous king' about whom, tellingly, nothing is said except that he 'though in the midst of pleasures was not led into vice', 'remained unblemished like the reflection of the moon in the mire', and 'harnessed royal splendour through unfaltering moral principle (*rājaśrīḥ dharmeṇāvyabhicāriṇā*)'.[71]

Another pair of exemplars begins with King Mihirakula 'of violent deeds' who killed his subjects by the millions and the narration of whose wicked acts was 'polluting for speech'.[72] Instructively, he is followed to the throne by his son, one King Baka 'the righteous', who brings law and order back to the land. Making the contrast explicit, Kalhaṇa says of him: 'Born from the great oppressor (*atisaṁtāpadā*), he became the delight of the people (*janāhlādakaḥ*), like the pouring rain after a day of excessive heat ….'[73]

Then comes King Candrāpīḍa in the fourth *taraṅga* whom Kalhaṇa credits with mastery of law and justice and 'virtues such as forgiveness and valour both that served [him] in equal measure like the seasons [serve] the garden of heaven'.[74] He was assassinated deceitfully after an all-too-brief reign at the behest of his brother who ascended the throne after him. This was Tārāpīḍa the terrible (*caṇḍaḥ*), as Kalhaṇa puts it, who inspired fear by repression, and met a fitting end also by assassination by those he had oppressed.[75]

And then in the seventh *taraṅga* there is King Kalaśa and his son Harṣa, who, though he deposed his father, appears in just the same dark aspect as him. While the former lived a long and lurid life of 'vile acts' lost to debauchery, Harṣa's career

surpasses his in folly, cruelty, and wanton desecration, interestingly winning for him the title of 'the Turk King' (*rājaturuṣka*) from Kalhaṇa.[76] His rule soon dissolved into dissipation marked by incestuous rapes and the naked pursuit of wealth by a deadly persecution of his subjects (*prajāpīḍana*). It is in their context, in the verse I quoted earlier which compares virtue with the lasting fragrance of camphor, that Kalhaṇa emphasizes the need for a king to preserve a high reputation above all else.

In contrast to the conjoined exemplar of Kalaśa and Harṣa, comes the reign of King Uccala who succeeds them and in whom Kalhaṇa's ethical and monarchical ideals seem to come together. This 'high-souled/high-minded king (*mahātmanaḥ*, *manasvinaḥ*)', 'beloved of the people' was 'keen on favouring the weak and removing the misery of the inhabitants [acting as a father would towards his sons]'. Free from greed (*nirlobha*), his indifference to riches was his great merit for Kalhaṇa as was the 'protection extended to the people by this beneficent king of ardent vitality'.[77]

In composing a 'River of Kings-as-exemplars' thus, it may be said that Kalhaṇa was fashioning something of an opposition of conscience, that is, constructing ideal models of rulership and negative paradigms of tyrannical behaviour against which rulers could be measured. Further, that Kalhaṇa indeed looked upon Kashmiri history as a laboratory for morality, wherein ethics more than chronology determined the classification of kings, is established again by the following, bird's-eye commentary: Attesting the internal memory of the text, Kalhaṇa takes a time-out from the narrative in the final *taraṅga* of his epic to ruminate in eleven verses over his entire thesis, as it were, zigzagging through the centuries. With the principle of greed (*lobha*) as the thread, he groups together Jayāpīḍa, Śankaravarman, Yaśaskara, Kṣemagupta, Sangrāmarāja, Ananta, Kalaśa, Harṣa, and Sussala, and writes: 'The wealth of kings acquired by the persecution of the commonalty goes either to their rivals in love, or to their enemies, or to the flames'. As opposed to this he observes that Kings Candrāpīḍa, Uccala, and Avantivarman 'unflinchingly upheld the law; their justly acquired treasure never found an indecent end'.[78]

CRITIQUE OF POWER—AND TIME

It is interesting to note that Kalhaṇa's obsession with ethical conduct was not confined to the royalty; he also prescribed standards for those surrounding the king. The leading virtue for them was loyalty, and Kalhaṇa every now and then makes it a point to pause his chronicling of the acts of the powerful to note, applaud, and valorize acts of loyalty unto death shown by commoners—not only by liegemen for their lord but also by courtesan-keeps of the king and even by cooks and cats for their mistress, the queen![79] Displaying complexity, Kalhaṇa's intense upholding of fidelity leads him to passionately denounce treason (*droha*) *even when it is against a wrongful king*. This

reiterates his staunch monarchism and simultaneously highlights his emphasis on honour and righteousness in any event. Thus when the people decapitate the body of the deposed Harṣa the Horrible, Kalhaṇa calls them 'sacrilegious' (*nirbrahmaṇyaḥ janaḥ*) for having 'severed like a thief the head of the sovereign'. He adds that the earth together with the oceans trembled and the cloudless sky discharged a torrent of rain at this 'indecent' (*ayuktam*) behaviour.[80]

Even as he laid down a model for kingship in Kashmir, so acute is Kalhaṇa's didactic strain that, perhaps understandably, it trains its guns on monarchy itself. Thus though the text treats it as exalted, it also critiques monarchy as an inherently and inevitably unreliable and fickle institution. Incidentally, this is how several classical *kāvya*s have regarded kingship, in ways more or less obvious; though mirroring śāstric prescriptivism, this critique is very much *kāvya*'s own intervention in the discourse of *artha* and *rājadharma*.[81] The *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s dispiriting cynicism about the political life of Kashmir has been noted by McCrea but declared as a part of the text's 'departure from the literary norms of the *mahākāvya*',[82] thus perhaps overlooking the fact that such a function may have been an integral part of *kāvya*'s mandate, as I have argued.

This critique in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is usually in the form of hit-and-run quips. Here are just a few typical examples: 'More difficult than the rising of a *vetāla* (ghost-in-a-corpse), or a jump down a precipice, or masticating poison, or embracing a viper is, in truth, the service of royalty.' 'When sons, wives, friends and servants are the objects of their suspicion, who knows whom these kings consider worthy of their confidence?' 'Kings, when their purpose is served, have no recollection of benefit [done to them]. He who has aided his rise to a high place, the king cuts him down, like a woodcutter when he is coming down the branch of a tree by which he has gone up.' 'First the stork and then the king is, in truth, sustained by perfidy.'[83]

Building on this, Kalhaṇa offers something of a larger critique of power. This is sometimes from a humanist and sometimes an ascetic perspective; all told, it rounds off and both deepens and elevates the concern for the ethical and the discursive with which Kalhaṇa seeks to frame his meditative poem. Thus, the following analogy drawing on the Epics at the death of the powerful king Uccala offers a corrective to the might of monarchy:

> The lord of Lankā, conqueror of the three worlds, suffered a rout from lower animals [monkeys]; the lord of the Kurus, paramount among kings, received a kick on the head. Thus everyone has … a mischance stripping him of his exalted rank as if he were a commoner. Who indeed can afford to be high and mighty and, obsessed with oneself, persist in conceit?[84]

In a similar vein is the following resigned observation:

> Lion-claws, which are the defensive armour of the forest … in due course come to pass hanging [as amulets] from the necks of infants. The ivory teeth of tuskers, their weapon of war, get bandied about by gamblers in a game of dice. An ascendant position is by no means assured to prowess … Even the sun day after day undergoes vicissitudes ranging from fierceness to mildness; what stability can there then be in the faculties of living beings?[85]

Then, in a moral and mortal take on power, Kalhaṇa has King Avantivarman soliloquize thus:

> There is perhaps no man who, having been at first shown favour [by Royal Fortune Śrī, the sweetheart of kings], has later not been harassed by her, as by the friendship of the vulgar … She, who is without affection, has never followed kings in death when they, without friends or provisions, are en route for the next world.… Gold vessels of the banquet and other articles collected in the treasury rooms—how is it that those kings who have departed for the next world [no longer] own them? … Torn from the necks of those [enemies] about to die … the necklaces, accursed and unholy, for whom are they an attraction? Predecessors have left the ornaments behind after defiling them with hot tears of anguish when about to die; while touching them, who does not have a qualm?[86]

Elsewhere in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, Kalhaṇa comments: 'Despite efforts to control physical ills and mental worries, [and] even after realizing the transient nature of existence, fools do not give up ambition, seduced as they are by the attractions of treacherous fortune.'[87] However, 'on the same path of death is every individual plunging headlong. I am the slayer and he the slain—the notion of a difference [between the two] lasts but a short while … He who but yesterday exults while slaying his foe, at the end sees an enemy gloating over him when he is himself about to be killed. How awful! Fie on this illusion!'[88]

The *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s relentless recourse thus to the themes of mortality and evanescence of human life and action was not just a sardonic critique of vanity and power but can be seen as a profound deposition on temporality itself and its ever-attendant quality, change. A recognition of this fundamentally historical character of time frames the text in that it begins, too, with describing itself as a balancing remedy (*bhaiṣajya*), an antidote as it were, for kings who may be seized by change—prosperity or decline—across space and time (*nṛpāṇām ullāse hrāse vā deśakālayoḥ*).[89] A certain universality and inevitability, then, attach to the march of history in this vision, as also a convergence of transcendent and contingent truths.

While there has been growing recognition recently among Indian historians of the legitimacy of regarding certain traditional Sanskrit genres such as *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* as repositories of an embedded form of history, few, if any, have suspected *kāvya*—beyond the clichéd 'historical biography' (*carita*)—to possess any such merit at all. I

have argued that *kāvya* as a cognitive and discursive mode is ideal for the representation of the experience of historicality in a way that is both literal in what it asserts about specific events and figurative in what it suggests about the meaning of this experience. Literary imagination, in so far as it seeks to explicate and illuminate, is therefore a historical imagination. Literature does not merely reproduce the events it describes; 'it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about them with different emotional valences'.[90]

A genre, however, is by definition an umbrella term, gathering under it a wide variety of modes and practices. It is no one's case that all *kāvya*s did or would relate to the past in identical ways. In the case of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, whether in his normative prescription of power or in his philosophical critique of it, Kalhaṇa, like a few of his predecessors, made masterly use of the fecundity of his chosen genre to weave his discourse on and for Kashmir. In emplotting Kashmir's past around the principle of moral order, he narrativized it, and it is in narrativizing the past that he historicized it, by lending shape and meaning to a vast swathe of time and the innumerable historical figures and events entailed by it. Subscribing to a value-laden epistemology that was intertextually derived, for Kalhaṇa writing history did not exhaust truth; moralizing reality was more the goal. Hence, the didactic concerns of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* framed the dynastic narrative of Kashmir within the larger project of creating ethical monarchy and governance, evaluating every actor and episode on a politico-moral barometer for qualities such as justice, loyalty, high-mindedness, temperance, liberality, and people's welfare. Over and above these, it sought to unveil the transcendent end of human life—the supreme ethic, detachment—not as a goal in itself but as a wider insight into the nature of change over time and as a means of putting in perspective the ultimate reality of all human action. 'Seeing' the past, as only a *kavi* could, involved seeing and showing all these truths.

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1 Wilson wrote that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was 'the only Sanskrit composition yet discovered to which the title of history can with any propriety be applied'. 'An Essay on the Hindu History of Cashmir', *Asiatic Researches* 15 (1825): 1.

2 *Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅgiṇī or Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, vol. I, ed. M. A. Stein (Sanskrit Text with critical notes) (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1960 [Bombay, 1892]). The first full English translation was by Yogesh Chunder Dutt in 1879–87, but it was based on the uncritical Calcutta edition, which was subsequently widely regarded as erroneous.

3 A. L. Basham, 'The Kashmir Chronicle', in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C.H. Philips (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 58. R. C. Majumdar, 'Ideas of History', in *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, ed. C. H. Philips, pp. 14, 25.

4 Quoted by Ranjit Sitaram Pandit in *The River of Kings*: *Rājataraṅgiṇī, The Saga of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, trans. Ranjit Sitaram Pandit (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2004 [1935, 1968]), p. xv, verse 8, fn 21.

5 Majumdar, 'Ideas of History', pp. 22–4.

[6] Thapar, 'Kalhaṇa', pp. 52–62.

[7] See Rama Mantena, 'The Question of History in Precolonial India', *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007): 396–408. It is also true, however, as Sheldon Pollock has pointed out, that this misconception about the truth status of Indian narratives of the past can be seen as a subset of widespread confusion regarding the multiple modes in which historical truth can be conveyed, a confusion which can be spied even among pre-colonial thinkers such as Al biruni and Firishta. Pollock, 'Pretextures of Time', *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007): 365.

[8] See Michael Witzel, 'On Indian Historical Writing: The Role of *Vaṁśāvalīs*', *Journal of the Japanese Association of South Asian Studies* 2 (1990): 1–57.

[9] *RT* I.16.

[10] See R. Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[11] This is Bühler's criticism seconded by Majumdar. Fascinatingly, Kalhaṇa even emends the traditional dating of the protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*, the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, to the *dvāpara* age, claiming mathematically that they belonged in the *kaliyuga* instead (*RT* I.50–1). This shows how seriously he took the *caturyuga* system.

[12] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[13] *RT* I.25–7, 240–72.

[14] *RT* I.7.

[15] Majumdar, 'Ideas of History', pp. 21–2.

[16] *RT* I.23.

[17] See Walter Slaje, '"In the Guise of Poetry": Kalhaṇa Reconsidered', in *Śāstrārambha: Inquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit*, ed. W. Slaje (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), pp. 224–6.

[18] Leon Goldstein has best theorized this critique by pointing out that historical knowledge is necessarily inferential since 'the past as such' is an absent object of enquiry. History therefore cannot have truth correspondence with the past in ways traditionally seen as mimetic or empirical. For a lucid discussion, see B. Surendra Rao, *History as Historiography* (Bangalore: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2010), pp. 9–10. See also E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 12.

[19] *RT* V.392; VI.157–8; VII.283.

[20] *RT* IV.620.

[21] *RT* VII.867.

[22] *RT* I.325; VI.288.

[23] Sheldon Pollock, 'Mīmāṁsā and the Problem of History in Traditional India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 603–10.

[24] Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (New York: Other Press, 2003).

[25] See Pollock, 'Pretextures of Time'.

[26] Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, pp. 99, 259–60.

[27] Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, pp. 256–60.

[28] Shulman in a preface to a recent forum on the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* writes: 'Let us set aside at the outset the probably futile question of whether the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is or is not history.' 'Preface, Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī*: What Is It?' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 127.

29 Whitney Cox, 'Literary Register and Historical Consciousness in Kalhaṇa: A Hypothesis', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 131–60.

30 Cox, 'Literary Register', p. 159.

31 Slaje, 'In the Guise of Poetry', pp. 207–44. Lawrence McCrea, '*Śānta Rasa* in the *Rājataraṅgiṇi*: History, Epic, and Moral Decay', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 179–99.

32 This compulsion of having to choose between the label of 'history' or 'poetry' is seen in Bernhard Kolver, *Textkritische und philologische Untersuchungen zur Rājataraṅgiṇī des Kalhaṇa*, VOHD, Suppl. 12 (Wiesbaden, 1971) as well as Pandit, *The River of Kings*; Stein, *Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅgiṇī*; Basham, 'The Kashmir Chronicle'; and Mauriz Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983 revised edition).

33 *Rājataraṅgiṇī of Jonarāja*, ed. Srikantha Kaul (Hoshiarpur: Woolner Indological Series 7, 1967), verse 26.

34 *RT* I.8–10.

35 In following the *vaṁśāvalī* tradition, too, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was not the first among *kāvya*s but had at least one predecessor, namely Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁśam*, a little-noticed fact.

36 McCrea has elegantly argued for seeing the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as an attempted work of *itihāsa* rather than *kāvya* ('*Śānta rasa* in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'). His interpretation, however, hinges on a somewhat forced separation of the 'dispiriting' *śānta rasa* from the other 'affirming' or 'upbeat' *rasa*s of *kāvya*, which, he believes, made Kalhaṇa model his work on the *Mahābhārata* instead.

37 *RT* VIII.2975–7.

38 *RT* VII.1089.

39 *RT* III.68–74.

40 *RT* IV.29.

41 *RT* VII.1435–6.

42 *RT* V.189–90.

43 *RT* VII.998.

44 *RT* V.305.

45 *RT* VIII.765.

46 Kashmir's history-writing is attributed by Basham ('Kashmir Chronicle', p. 57) and Thapar ('Kalhaṇa', p. 61) to her contact with central and west Asian 'peoples possessing a stronger sense of history than did India'. Recently, Jesse Knutson takes this persistent fallacy to an extreme in saying, 'It is obvious the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was modelled … on the Shahnama [of Firdausi]' ('Poetic Justice: On Kalhaṇa's Historical Aesthetics', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, 2 [2015]: 283). Knutson even attributes 'the cyclical quality and pregiven moral patterning' in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, which are patently Sanskritic tendencies, to Iranian heritage (p. 284).

47 Within the Sanskrit genre of *kāvya*, it is always possible, as Bronner and Cox have argued, to identify a distinctive sub-genre such as *kathā* into which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (like its fellow-Kashmiri *Kathāsaritsāgara*) fits. See Cox, 'Literary Register', and Bronner, 'From Conqueror to Connoisseur: Kalhaṇa's Account of Jayāpīḍa and a Fashioning of Kashmir as a Kingdom of Learning', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 161–77. See also Ch. 3, fn 69, for the significance of this sub-genre.

48 See Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010; New York: Seagull Books, 2011), Introduction.

49 For *upadeśa*, see *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. M. Ramakrishna Kavi (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1934), I.111–13. For *vaicakṣaṇya*, see *Kāvyālaṅkāra of Bhāmaha*, eds B. N. Sarma and Baladeva Upadhyaya (Benaras: Chowkhamba

Sanskrit Series, 1928), I.2. For *adhyeya*, see *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa of Bhoja*, ed. V. Raghavan, Harvard Oriental Series, 53 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 596.

50 *Kāvyamīmāṁsā*, ed. C. D. Dalal (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1934), Chapter 12, 62–3, 1.17–21, translated in Phyllis Granoff, 'Sarasvati's Sons: Biographies of Poets in Medieval India,' *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 49, no. 2 (1995): 364. The poetic–spiritual parallel that Rājaśekhara claims is expressed thus: 'Poets explore with their words that which *yogin*s see through the power of their religious accomplishments.'

51 *Kāvyānuśāsana*, eds Rasiklal C. Parikh and V. M. Kulkarni (Bombay: Sri Mahavira Jaina Vidyalaya, 1964), p. 432, translated in Pollock, 'Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out', in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Pollock (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 53.

52 *RT* I.5.

53 *Bhūta* here could perform the double meaning of 'past' and 'real'. I am grateful to Phyllis Granoff for emphasizing this in a personal communication.

54 *RT* I.47.

55 *Rājataraṅgiṇī of Śrīvara and Śuka*, ed. Srikanth Kaul (Hoshiarpur: Woolner Indological Series 8, 1966), I.1, 4.

56 See also RT I.3, 45. Bilhaṇa's *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* I.26 (*pṛthvipateḥ santi na yasya pārśve kavīśvarās tasya kuto yaśāṁsi*). Ratnākara's *Haravijaya* VI.8 (*viśadam bhavadbhir abhitanyatetarām abhitaḥ purāṇakavinā kṛtam yaśaḥ*). Slaje makes this observation in 'In the Guise of Poetry', pp. 216–17.

57 *RT* I.46.

58 *RT* I.4.

59 For details, see Slaje, 'In the Guise of Poetry', pp. 217–18.

60 Pollock, 'Sanskrit Literary Culture', pp. 49–50.

61 Pollock, 'Mīmāṁsā', p. 610.

62 I have discussed political morality as a subset of Kalhaṇa's rendition of Kashmir as a profoundly spiritual and ethical geography in Chapter 3 of this volume.

63 Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, p. 259.

64 *RT* I.187–9. Verses quoted from the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* in this book are from Pandit's English translation based on Stein's critical edition. At a few places I have taken the liberty of rearranging Pandit's syntax or substituting my choice of word for his to make it an easier read.

65 *RT* V.211–13.

66 *RT* II.47–8.

67 References in order of occurrence are *RT* VII.773; VIII.2663; VI. 193; VII.998; VIII.122, 2034; V.204–5; I.350–8; III.131–45, 300–23.

68 Cox has also spoken of 'uncanny connections and resonances cutting across decades and even centuries' in the text ('Literary Register', p. 157). In giving evidence of these, he confines himself to a couple of episodes from two *taraṅga*s. Moreover, the import of his recognizing these connections is underdetermined since he avers elsewhere in the article that Kalhaṇa is *not* 'programmatic in his delineation of a wider historical structure' (p. 155).

69 This understanding of history as narrative is after Hayden White and Paul Ricouer. See White's *Metahistory* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

70 *RT* I.198, 250–65, 269–74.

71 *RT* I.276–85.

72 *RT* I.289–307.

73 *RT* I.325–9.

74 *RT* IV.46–7, 52–60, 95–6.

75 *RT* IV.112–25.

76 *RT* VII.277–316 (Kalaśa) and VII.961–1245 (Harṣa). The 'Turuṣka' reference is from VII.1095.

77 *RT* VIII.48–122, 160.

78 *RT* VIII.1951–61. See also *RT* V.165–7; VII.1101–2, 1107.

79 Some examples: *RT* IV.324–35 is devoted to the praise of the 'spiritual power of remarkable loyalty' of the liegemen of the king of Gauḍa who risked their all to avenge in Kashmir the murder of their master by Lalitāditya, the king of Kashmir. See also VII.90, 560–1, 855–60; VIII.13, 323–4, 414, 1224–5, 2157–9, 2410–13.

80 *RT* VII.1721–6. See also earlier *RT* VII.1632–3. This is despite the fact that elsewhere Kalhaṇa had expressed surprise that Harṣa had not been assassinated by some enemy, given how loathsome he was (*RT* VII.1140–1).

81 See Kaul, *Imagining the Urban*, Chapter 4. *Artha* and *rājadharma* refer to political power and statecraft.

82 McCrea, '*Śānta-rasa*', p. 198.

83 In order of reference: *RT* VIII.2187, 1244; V.310–11, 321.

84 *RT* VIII.335.

85 *RT* VIII.828–30.

86 *RT* V.6–15.

87 *RT* VI.146.

88 *RT* VI.146; VIII.358–9.

89 *RT* I.21.

90 This passage is indebted to White's statements on the historical narrative, which are readily adaptable to *kāvya*, as I have tried to argue. See White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 177 and *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 91.

CHAPTER THREE

Imagined Landscape

Myth, Memory, and Place-Making

> *Is it we who invent the stories and thus inform the land, or does the land give us the stories, thus inventing us?*
>
> —*Paula Gunn Allen*

Just as they may configure time, texts also conceptually organize space. This chapter explores the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s representation of the regional space that was Kashmir. Avowedly an account of royal dynasties, the text has traditionally been studied as political history, and also for interspersed information on the 'society' and 'economy' of the ancient kingdom. Here I interrogate the text as cultural history, with special reference to its representation of the physical features of the land and the range of cultural constructions put on these through myth and memory. To do this is to view the land as landscape, that is, to understand geography as overlaid by narrative. Adopting this method, I trace how the text transforms (abstract) space into (intimate) place, and a land into a homeland.

COSMOPOLITAN AND VERNACULAR IN KASHMIR

Even as the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* composes Kashmir as a regional entity, it does so through a medium that is generally not understood to have served vernacular expression, namely the 'cosmopolitan' Sanskrit *kāvya*. This is significant. It questions much of what we have recently learnt about the relationship between language and space in premodern South Asia. I refer to Sheldon Pollock's cosmopolitan and vernacular paradigms: this is a binary that has proved most instructive in inducing many new aspects to the sociology of language use in early India, especially for Sanskrit, a language otherwise misunderstood to be confined to ritual. This binary, however, needs to be revisited in the light of the exception that early Kashmir provides to both the phenomena involved.

The *Rājataraṅgiṇī* defies any formulaic understanding of literary cultures and how they relate to the spaces they represent. For one, here is a self-consciously regional account rendered in and through a quintessentially trans-regional language, Sanskrit.[1]

What is more, this happens in the absence of 'literarization', or beginnings of the composition of literature, in the vernacular tongue, Kashmiri. Pollock spoke of a process of vernacularization wherein, from the turn of the 2nd millennium CE, the emergence of regional kingdoms or 'vernacular polities' all over the subcontinent was accompanied by the rise of their local languages as literary or poetic languages, imitating yet displacing Sanskrit *kāvya* everywhere. The point is that this did not quite happen in Kashmir.

To explain briefly, the beginnings of literature in Kashmiri are somewhat hazy, that is, literature understood in a formal written, creative–narrative and aesthetic sense, such as *kāvya*, as different from scripture or treatise. To begin with, extant compositions in Kashmiri from the premodern period are sparse. Moreover, the earliest ones are two philosophical expressions of mysticism: the *Mahānaya Prakāśa*, a treatise on Śākta worship from the 13th or 15th centuries CE, and the celebrated saint Lal Ded's Śaiva *vākh*s or 'sayings' of the 14th century, which were purely oral. Neither, therefore, qualifies as literature in the sense in which Pollock spoke. According to B. N. Kachru, Avatāra Bhaṭṭa's *Bāṇāsura Kathā* from the 15th century is perhaps the earliest specimen of an aesthetic *kāvya* in Kashmiri.[2] However, it remained a solitary affair, hardly followed by other such works. We do not see therefore the emergence of a full-fledged literary culture in Kashmiri taking over from Sanskrit *kāvya* as we see happen, for instance, in Kannada, Bengali, or Awadhi in the early medieval period.[3]

Among the historical reasons for this could be the fact that in Kashmir one cosmopolitan literary culture, Sanskrit, was followed by another, Persian, which took over as the language of the Kashmiri court, administration, education, and elitism, sometime after the tumultuous Central Asian and then West Asian incursions, and subsequently the Mughal conquest of Kashmir, between the 13th and 17th centuries. Scholars report that Kashmiri remained low in prestige and did not enjoy any professional or aesthetic status all through the very centuries of the medieval period that vernaculars in other parts of India were born and flourished. Sample the sentiment as late as the 19th century in this verse by a Kashmiri poet, Lachman Raina, writing in Persian:

> Writing verse in Kashmiri
> is groping in the dark.
> If you would shine as a candle flame,
> write in Persian verse;
> You would merely waste your talent if
> you write in Kashmiri.
> For you would not the jasmine hide
> in a nettle bush,
> Nor edible oil and spices waste

on a dish of mallow wild.
But times have changed and Persian is
no longer read;
and radish and sugar loaf are relished alike.[4]

What is intriguing, however, is that even after Independence in 1947, it is Urdu, and not Kashmiri, that was adopted as the state language of Jammu and Kashmir, continuing a long history of the state's dissociation from the vernacular.[5] The most recent linguistic scholarship suggests that today we are witnessing a move towards 'the demise of the distinct symbol and roots of the Kashmiri linguistic–cultural identity in favour of the non-native code, Urdu, which could emerge as the primary linguistic identity in the near future'.[6]

Be that as it may, though it definitely is one of the two earliest extant articulations of a Kashmiri territorial self-awareness and identity,[7] the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was not vernacular literature emerging in imitation of the universal Sanskrit literary culture, a phenomenon Pollock labelled as the 'cosmopolitan vernacular';[8] instead, it was a case of the cosmopolitan *as* the vernacular. This dual nature and function of Sanskrit in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*—local yet universal—is important to emphasize since *the text does not see them as mutually exclusive identities to sport*.[9] In fact, the cosmopolitan seems to have been constitutive of the local in Kashmir rather than sharply demarcated from it. Indeed, Kalhaṇa may also have espoused a regional consciousness that aspired to transcend the narrow limits of a 'vernacular polity'. This is discussed in the context of King Lalitāditya in Chapter 4 of this volume. Further, the distinct exteriority evident in the indigeneity of Kashmir's cultural identity, again elaborated in Chapter 4, also mirrors the point being made here.

This then points to the cultural fallacy involved in maintaining that languages, and relatedly cultural affiliations, could be only one or the other. Specifically for the purpose of this chapter, the apparent discrepancy between vernacular subject and cosmopolitan medium is of the essence: it is a key to identifying the regional and trans-regional traditions and influences that went into the making of Kalhaṇa's Kashmir. This chapter proceeds with the understanding that the interplay between the universal and the particular frames the literary composition of Kashmir as a space/place.

LAYERS OF LANDSCAPE

Much of this literary portrayal would constitute what Diana Eck in an all-India context has called 'imagined landscape': myths, stories, and associations built around natural forces and natural features—mountains, rivers and their confluences, lakes and springs, fields and embankments, swamps and precipices, storms and floods—which generate a

sense of place and region, and a rootedness in the land.[10] These myths could be local lore or they could be derived subcontinentally from Epic and Puranic archetypes, weaving together gods, demigods, kings, peoples, and places. They filled out and lent tradition to the land that was Kashmir, anchoring and orienting its people not only to their own physical world but also willy-nilly to the moral that inhered in these constructed and preserved memories. The practice of landscape, then, encoded the realm with meanings and embedded it with cultural knowledge. On the strength of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and its 7th-century predecessor, the *Nīlamata Purāṇa*, on which it deeply draws, it is possible to say that true to the pan-Indian pattern, mythology and geography in Kashmir were 'a joint imaginative and descriptive undertaking'. Geographical knowledge was 'grounded in the mythical apprehension of the world's meaning and order'[11] even as myth-making itself was resonant with the natural/geographical markers of the land. And since geographical awareness comprises a sense of regional identity, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* enacted Kashmir as a region in these ways.

While the connection between myths and regional identity-formation is not new and has been documented for various parts of the Indian subcontinent, it is not so in the case of the representation of Kashmir in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* where, as we saw in Chapter 2, the occurrence of myths in the narrative has tended to cause much consternation among historians and other scholars who view it as a disruption of the text's otherwise historical character and spirit.[12] In this context, the phenomenology of Kalhaṇa's mythicized rendition of Kashmir as a landscape needs to be noted and emphasized: as we will see, the immediacy and specificity of the natural elements of Kashmir with which he puts together the spatial imaginary constitute a vivid materiality. Therefore, a constant interweaving of the two discourses, the 'real' and the 'imagined', the topographic and the mythic–narrative, is on display. And that is not all. I shall further argue towards the close of this chapter that adding a third layer to this tapestry of literary signification is the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s imbrication of the political in its geographical excursus.

It can be argued that objective history has had perhaps less to do with a sense of regional belonging than subjective traditions and associations, such as not only myths but also legends and stereotypes about the land and its people that gain currency often precisely through textualization. That the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* displays this tendency, specific to it as a *kāvya*, for conjuring the distinctiveness of Kashmir has received little scholarly notice. I refer to the use of rhetoric and imagery at various points in the text in a manner highly evocative of the local and the folk. This is significant even from the point of view of literary history since it involved the invention and deployment of descriptors, similes and analogies which were, as we shall see, unique to the Kashmiri context. This should qualify the image of *kāvya* as a reified literary genre rigidly

wedded to stock conventions and figures. The *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is a splendid example of how Sanskrit adopted and adapted local motifs, locales, and content to a trans-local poetics and served as a vehicle of regional literary expression. And, true to the potent concerns of a politico-literary medium, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* in the process also inaugurated and sustained a critique of local politics. Let us see how.

MAPPING THE LAND

In the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, there is an identifiable sense of chronicling a distinct spatial unit or region (*deśa*, *maṇḍala*) with which the author identifies himself and his protagonists. This is achieved by means of certain practices of place. One such practice is emphasizing belongingness through the use of terms such as *svadeśa* (one's own land) and *janmabhūmi* (one's birthplace).[13] It is also effected via statements on the specialty of 'this unique land' and the enumeration of its extraordinary features in various ways. Also asserted in the text are the twin notions of 'one's own country' (*svadeśa*) versus 'the country of others' (*videśa*).[14]

Kalhaṇa deploys several markers of this place but does not attempt to spell out the boundaries of Kashmir since those seem to be a given in the text, coinciding as they did with an intermontane valley. That there were cognizable boundaries, however, is undoubtable from references to the frontier of Kashmir (*kaśmīradvāra*),[15] to approaching, entering, or exiting the territory of Kashmir, as also to a distinct people called the Kashmiris[16] as opposed to those of neighbouring territories including Rājapurī (Rajouri),[17] Darad (Chitral and Gilgit?),[18] Bhauṭṭas (Ladakh), Trigarta (Kangra), Campā (Chamba), Madra (Punjab), and Darvābhisāra,[19] and wider afield, as distinct from the Turuṣkas,[20] Khaśas,[21] Tuhkhāras, and the like.[22] As a character is made to say, '"This is my land, this is alien land (*svadeśoyam videśoyam*)," such is the urge in the minds of beings due to habitual residence, the association of ideas, and the practice of exclusion.'[23] Of course, the borders of the kingdom also shifted in minor ways from time to time as a result of war, especially to encompass parts of Rājapurī, Lohara (north Punjab), Campā, Trigarta, Bhauṭṭa, Uraṣā (Hazara), and Udbhāṇḍapura (Ohind, NWFP),[24] but expansion of influence rather than of territory was perhaps the more lasting result.[25]

Broadly, the text brings with it a sense of the land of Kashmir being the one traversed by the Vitastā (Jhelum) river. A river allows people to conceptualize as a whole the land across which it flows.[26] It may also permit sub-divisions. Thus we hear of Kashmir demarcated into the northern valley (Kramarājya or Kamraz in Kashmiri) and the southern valley (Maḍavarājya or Maraz) of the Vitastā, a designation in use until today.[27] Indeed, in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* the markers of the space of Kashmir seem to

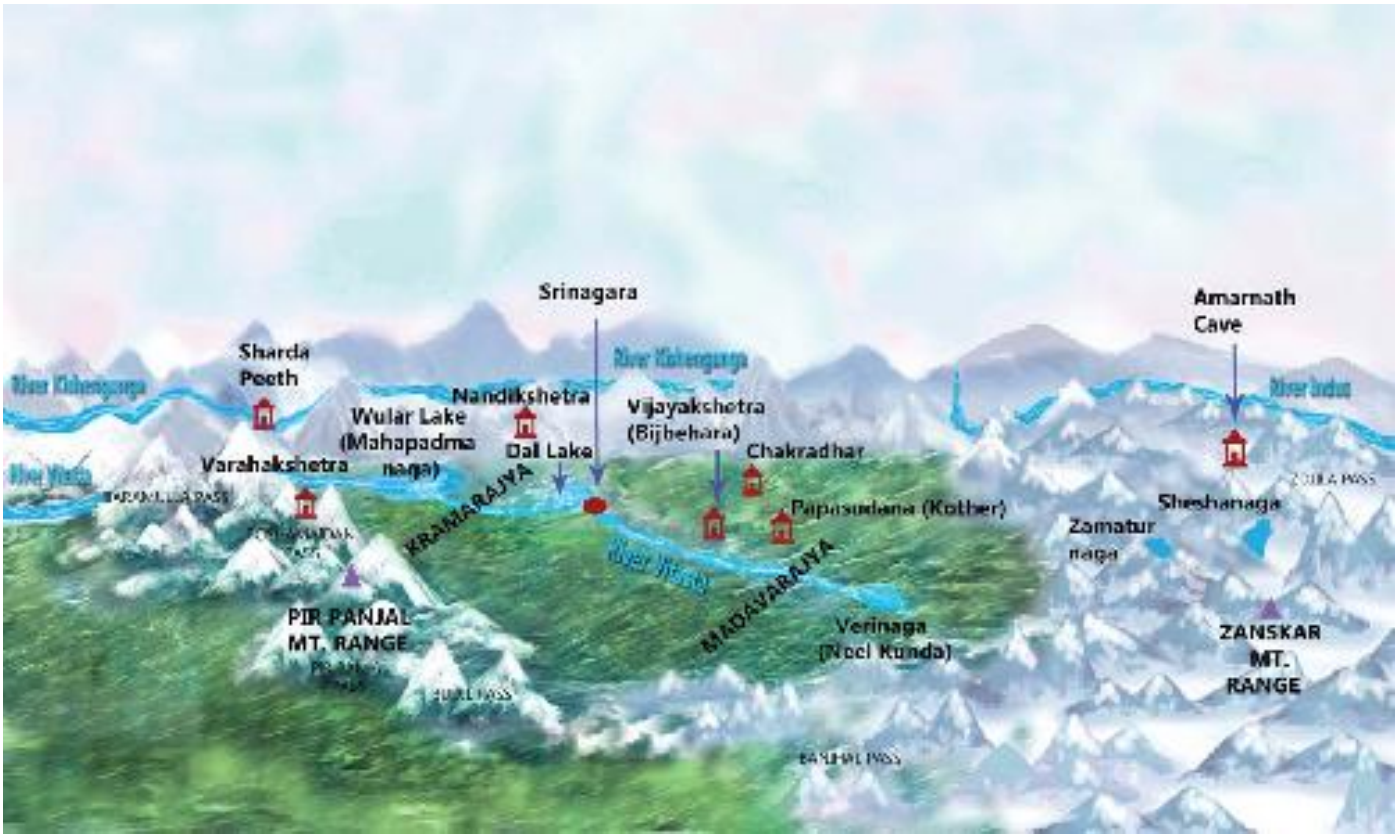
be nebulous natural phenomena that exhibited a certain omnipresence and influence in the Valley. The foremost of these are the waters of Kashmir, a recurrent element in one form or the other in the text.

Water is the originary motif in the heavily Puranic cosmogonic account of the Valley that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* replays. Following the account in the *Nīlamata*, it speaks of the *Satīsaras* or lake of Satī, the 'land in the womb of the Himalayas … filled with waters for six *manvantara*s'. This primordial lake, when drained by the gods at the behest of sage Kaśyapa, and rid of the resident hydel demon, Jalodbhava, came to be the site where the *maṇḍala* or kingdom of Kashmir was founded.[28] The very name 'Kashmir' is said to carry within it the syllable for water, 'ka', so that water then is seen performing a metonymic function for the land.[29] (Fascinatingly, the lake drainage myth has been found to occur with variations all along the Himalayas, from Kashmir in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east, including Nepal.[30]) This is the first of several myths in Kalhaṇa's narrative relating to the physiography of Kashmir that combines geology and tradition. We know that the geomorphological formation of the Valley did occur from an ancient lake,[31] evidently a memory preserved in myth.

Moreover, the Valley did not drain out completely and a number of residual seasonal lakes and pools, known as *nāga*s, have remained in Kashmir.[32] Therefore, in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* too, Kashmir is described as 'the resort of the *nāga*s', 'the territory which is under the protection of Nīla, supreme lord of all the *nāga*s (tutelary spring deities), whose parasol is the swelling Nīla *kuṇḍa* (spring; modern-day Verinag) with the flowing waters of the Vitastā for its staff'.[33] The river Vitastā herself is associated with the goddess Pārvatī whom she embodies, in a classic illustration of Puranic transformation of stock mythological material to fulfil a local situational context.[34] Further, Anne Feldhaus has pointed out that the imagery of a river as a human or divine body serves to bring together various places along the river in a conceptual unity.[35]

The first *taraṅga* then proceeds with the casting of a bird's eye over the physiography of Kashmir (see Map 1: The Valley of Kashmir). This is a selective and suggestive survey held up by poetic claims, not a cartographic one, but evocative and effective nonetheless. Kashmir's identity with mountains is declared in a straightforward way. It is called 'the country magnificent with its mountains'.[36] Mountain ramparts are described as the arms of Kashmir stretched out for safeguarding the *nāga*s, and the king of Kashmir is, in turn, described as the 'guardian of the mountains'.[37] This would count not simply as a naturalistic reference but also a symbolic one, since mountains are typically imbued with mythic sanctity in India. As Eck writes, the transposition of Himalayan peaks from the north to other parts of India was/is a widespread motif of sanctification.[38] For Kashmir, however, no such transposition was needed; the Himalayas and the northern direction were already

features of the land. Asserting this claim to sacred terrain would then ring particularly true for Kashmir and simultaneously serve to create a sense of place. Thus, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* says: 'In the three worlds the earth, the producer of jewels, is worthy of praise, and on it, the North, the direction of the lord of wealth; there again the mountain, the father of Pārvatī [Himalaya] is praiseworthy and within it, the country of Kashmir.'[39] Elsewhere it is claimed: 'To the mighty Gonanda, king of Kashmir, the [northern] direction, of which the dazzling Kailāśa is the smile and the tossing Gangā the scarf, rendered homage.'[40]



Map 1 Bird's-eye view of the Kashmir Valley: Artist's impression

Note: Map is not to scale; it is meant for broad, representational purposes only.

NATURE AND RITUAL

The Puranic influence, again, is at work in Kalhaṇa's scheme to sanctify the entire topography by merging the physical geography of the land with sacred geography. Thus, a description of the rivers and lakes and mountain peaks of Kashmir is interspersed seamlessly with an enumeration of the many *tīrtha*s or shrines and pilgrimage spots that accompany the physical features of the land. Exemplifying a highly locative world view, we are told of the sanctuaries of Pāpasūdana (modern-day district Kuther), Nandikṣetra (Harmukh), Cakrabhṛt (Tsakder), Vijayeśa (Vijbror or Bijbehara),

Ādikeśava, and Īśāna, and of the hill of the goddess Śāradā near the confluence of rivers Madhumatī and Sarasvatī (modern-day Neelam village), and the Bheḍagiri mountain atop which resides goddess Sarasvatī as a swan in a lake. Naming shrines, another practice of place, meant mapping a world linked by these shrines, making possible a sense of their area as a region.[41] Thus, sanctification was not merely a means to sacred ends; it was also a powerful technique of mental map-making.

We are told in sum of how 'in that country adorned by [these *tīrtha*s] … there is not so much land as covered by a sesamum seed that is profane'.[42] The concluding rhetorical flourish apart, the naming of this string of shrines was not mere mechanical enumeration but would have struck a chord with knowing audiences, immediately conjuring the region that these collectively constituted. More on Kashmir's pilgrimage economy later; note for now that this close association of the very land of Kashmir with spiritual merit serves a double purpose in and for the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*: it initiates a discourse of 'the presence of piety and absence of sin' (*puṇyapāpānāmanvayavyatiḥ*),[43] which was perhaps meant to set the stage for Kalhaṇa's ethicized commentary to unfold. For, a landscape is not just a view but an embodied point of view.[44]

Returning to the water motif, the other form in which water dominates the physical landscape of Kashmir is floods. *Toyaviplava* or havoc caused by water is a recurrent theme even in this largely political narrative, showing up as something successive kings had to grapple with from early on.[45] The devastation caused by inundation, 'which turned the land into a sheet of water',[46] and its aftermath, famine, are described by Kalhaṇa.[47] The measures to drain out the flood waters of the Mahāpadma or Wular (Sanskrit: Ullol) lake, inundating the entire length of the country, which were launched under King Avantivarman by an uncommon commoner Suyya, stand out as the most successful, and are reminiscent of the original draining of the lake that was Kashmir—even to Kalhaṇa's mind. Indeed, in a beautiful and clever bit of poetic association of the historical with the mythological, Kalhaṇa exclaims: 'Neither Kaśyapa nor Samkarṣaṇa conferred such benefits on this realm as Suyya of memorable acts did with ease … What Vishnu achieved in four incarnations of righteous acts, Suyya, who had a mass of religious merit, in one birth only.'[48] He set up stone barrages on the Vitastā and constructed multiple new channels for her floodwaters, so that 'the river shone like a black snake with numerous hoods on one body'. As a result, Kalhaṇa tells us, the holy confluence of the Sindhu (Sindh) and Vitastā which was in Trigrāmī shifted for all times into the precincts of Srinagar.[49] While the shrines of Viṣṇusvāmin and Vainyasvāmin existed at the old site, that of Hṛṣikeśayogaśayin came up at the new location.

Suyya, 'having reclaimed land from water like the primeval boar … founded all types of villages teeming with numerous people, rich in all provisions, provided with an irrigation system depending on their soil type and requirement, giving rise to splendid and bounteous crops'.[50] The people called the villages so formed *kuṇḍala* because the dykes lent the new land the shape of earrings. Suyya thus altered the physical as well as social and demographic landscape in significant ways. Kalhaṇa describes him as the 'lord of food personified (*annapati*)'.[51] For our purposes, he is symbolic of human intervention and manipulation of the topography of Kashmir, a fact that Kalhaṇa underlines.

A related force of nature that characterizes the space of Kashmir both in and out of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is heavy snowfall (*mahāhimapāta*).[52] It emerges as a recurrent calamity that visits the subjects of the kingdom of Kashmir and even its soldiers when they are out on military expeditions. On one such occasion, 'smitten by chilly winds and sinking in the muddy fields, soldiers abandoned horses and armour and behaved like the lower animals'[53] while other troops simply found their routes impassable because of accumulated snow.[54] 'The mass of snow seemed to the royal army as if it were shaped like death's couch of cotton; the troops lived in perpetual dread of snowfall.'[55] Snow emerges as verily a factor in the success or failure of the innumerable sieges and conspiracies that fill Kalhaṇa's chronicle; most spectacularly, King Sussala defeats the forces of the rebel Bhikṣācāra when sudden snowfall immobilizes the forces of the latter.[56]

Most of all, Kalhaṇa speaks of the 'grim and awful terror' (*mahābhaya ghora*) of the famine that follows the blight of untimely snowfall.[57] Interestingly, precipitation is represented as a variant of Kashmir's obsession with the water motif: snow, hail, and torrents of rain are presented as the doings of the *nāga*s, the tutelary spring deities, who are therefore metaphorically accused of 'carrying away the harvest' and even personified in one episode as thieves whom the peasants, fearing for their crops, drive 'into the zone of the king's impetuous wrath'.[58] Indeed the association of *nāga*s with water and agriculture has been reiterated in a recent study of central India where early historic *nāga* sculptures were found located on ancient dams.[59]

Snowfall is also associated with quasi-divine justice when it comes down to punish, as it were, the *bhikṣu*s (Buddhist monks) in the kingdom for their acts which were extinguishing the ritual order of the *nāga*s. We may note that the rites of the *nāga*s are early in the text and, obviously under the influence of the *Nīlamata*, characterized as the natural ritual order of the land. In the first *taraṅga* a time is described during and just after the reign of the Kuṣāṇas:

> … When the kingdom of Kashmir was, for the most part, an appanage of the Buddhists … who were opponents of the Vedas [and] having defeated all the learned men in open debate, had cut at the root of the

> religious rites prescribed in the *Nīlamata Purāṇa*. The country having drifted into confusion about the customary observances (*viluptācāra*), the *nāga*s, whose sacrificial offerings had been cut off, caused loss of human life by heavy falls of snow … Heavy snowfall occurred year after year for the harassment of the Buddhists (*bauddhabādhāya*) … King Gonanda III meanwhile attained sovereignty. He restored the performance of pilgrimages, sacrifices and other worship of the *nāga*s (*yātrāyāgādi nāgānām*) such as was customary in the past. When the king had once more promulgated the observances which had their origin in Nīla, the peril from the *bhikshu*s and the peril from snowfall abated everywhere.[60]

Here is a memory of ritual traditions in conflict and the resultant cultural confusion which is consciously brought into correlation with an endemic natural phenomenon, snowfall. Restoration of the Puranic ritual order was accompanied by the normalization of the natural order, with obvious implications for underlining the normativity of the former.

While on rituals, references in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* to specific, apparently popular practices bear mention. Chief among these were pilgrimages accompanied by much festivity (*yatrāmahotsava*). These were not just centred around the great gods, such as the *Śivarātri mahotsava*,[61] but also devoted to folk deities. Kalhaṇa mentions the 'great festival of the pilgrimage of Takṣaka, teeming with dancers and strolling players and a concourse of sightseers' which took place on the twelfth day of the dark half of Jyeṣṭha.[62] Takṣaka *nāga* was the patron saint of saffron fields and worshipped in like fashion at the sacred spring in Zevan (ancient Jayavana), just outside Srinagar, down to the modern period.[63] A Kashmiri funereal procession is also imaged as part of an analogy: 'In this land there is a day in the month of Bhādra on which [people] start on a journey to a *tīrtha* with the ashes of the dead when all the directions ring with the wailing of women.'[64]

STORYTELLING AND THE MORAL AGENCY OF *NĀGA*S

The centrality of the *nāga*s to the mythology of Kashmir is well known. What is less clear is whether the *nāga*s can be said to symbolize any social group such as the 'original' inhabitants of Kashmir co-opted by Puranic brahmanism.[65] It would be much more appropriate and consistent with the varied portrayals of the *nāga*s in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*—sometimes deities, sometimes lords of the land, at other times serpents or personified forces of nature, especially related to waterbodies and precipitation—to regard them as a motif or literary device. Fluid, changeable, ubiquitous, yet revered, the *nāga*s were classic myth-builders. This is especially relevant to the way stories woven around *nāga*s and enacted through their physical and moral agency construct the 'imagined landscape' of Kashmir. The major example of this in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is the story of Suśravas *nāga*, which is described as 'the legend recalled by the people to this very day (*adyāpi katheyam smaryate janaiḥ*)'.[66]

This invocation of the present (*adyāpi*) to corroborate the past, and indeed as a guarantor of verity itself, should be noted. It is a recurrent feature in the textual narrative[67] and a novel element of Kalhaṇa's historical method. At face value, it appears as a remarkable instance of Kalhaṇa's deference to proof and verifiability of what he narrates. However, there is much more to it than that. In conjunction with the role of 'the people' in verily generating and preserving this 'proof', the formula *adyāpi katheyam smaryate janaiḥ* weaves together the past and the present through the agency of popular memory. In the process it conjures and attests to a collective past that is not past, but a persistent part of the present. It also points to the interpenetration of folktale and myth. For, as Stuart Blackburn has pointed out, folktales were often essentially moral fictions with a recurrent theme of wrongdoing and retribution.[68] The terms used by Kalhaṇa, *janaśruti*, *kathā*, *vārtā* (people's sayings, stories), reinforce the oral character of these tales and may be a pointer to a certain civilizational centrality of storytelling in Kashmir.[69] We may recall in this context what a scholar has recently called the Kashmiri 'narrative public'.[70] I suggest that all of this qualifies the presumption that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, quintessentially a tale of kings, was an entirely elite enterprise. Kalhaṇa surprises us in important ways.

To return to the *nāga* myth, the story goes that Suśravas' daughter, Candralekhā, married off to a brahmana, is sighted and coveted by the wicked king Kinnara of Kashmir. When he attempts to have her carried away by force, the couple seeks asylum at Suśravas' abode, a pool.

> When the facts were reported to him, the lord of the *nāga*s, blind with rage, sallied forth from the pool. Having caused a blinding darkness from the fearful clouds which thundered, he burnt down the king together with the city by a terrific shower of boulders.… Thousands of human beings, who had entered through terror the shrine of Cakradhara for refuge, were burnt down in a trice.… The sister of Suśravas, the *nāga* lady from a cave in the Ramanya mountain, … [also] dropped a shower of boulders on the villages. Five *yojana*[71] of rural land was thus laid waste and is known as Ramanyāṭavī; it is to even this day full of heavy boulders and holes.[72]

The next day, however, Suśravas was full of remorse and, leaving the locality, he moved to a distant mountain where he built a lake 'gleaming like the ocean of milk'. This lake, we are told, 'on their way to the pilgrimage of Amarnath is visited by the people to this very day'. Moreover, his son-in-law, the brahman, who had become a *nāga* through the favour of Suśravas, built another lake in the locality 'celebrated as the lake of the son-in-law (*jāmātṛsaras*)'.[73] Fascinatingly, not only is the pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave a thriving popular Śaiva tradition of modern India, but the two lakes referred to also continue to exist and be known as the white-watered Sheshnag and the Zamaturnag, respectively.

Here is a conception of the past as being everywhere, scattered (in this case literally!) over multiple locales and narratives. Moreover, the interweaving of geography, myth, ritual, and folklore is brilliantly exemplified in this tale. And that is not all; it is overlaid with a major moral lesson, namely, through passionate lust, protectors (kings) often became destroyers of their own people, and 'as a result of the anger of a virtuous woman, the gods, or a brahmana, one hears in diverse accounts of the upheaval of the three worlds'.[74] This then is also what is meant to be 'recalled by the people' (and the audience of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*) when 'they see the debris of that city and the dry depression near Cakradhara'. Here was myth in its classic role as a teaching tool. Indeed in the Platonic exposition of myth ('muthos'), it is considered ethics by other means, which is needed to charm one into agreement when logic fails to do so.[75] And, as Christopher Tilley puts it: 'Both land and language are equally symbolic resources drawn on to foster correct social behavior and values. In narrative, geographical features of the landscape act as mnemonic pegs on which moral teachings hang.'[76] Finally, note also the synergy between this moral tale sedimented into the very earth and the text's overarching agenda of furthering ethical monarchy.

Another prominent *nāga* of whom we hear apart from Nīla and Suśravas is Mahāpadma. He is the resident of that massive lake today known as Wulur, floods in which were responsible for regular upheavals in both the Kramarājya and the Maḍavarājya. Suyya's measures were directed against floods in the Mahāpadma, as we have seen.[77] The Vitastā and the Mahāpadma emerge as the two waterbodies that dominate the life of the land. In the major episode to do with Mahāpadma *nāga* from the time of King Jayāpiḍa, he is clearly shown as a snake 'with a human face', and is shown applying to the king for help against a 'Dravidian spell monger' who wanted to drain his lake and sell the *nāga* to Marudeśa (desert) or the land that yearned for water.[78] When the king does not at first protect him and ends up toying with him instead, it offers Kalhaṇa the opportunity for a stringent critique of 'the thoughtless conduct of kings who are blinded by the intoxication of sovereignty'; the critique is duly planted as a monologue in the mouth of an indignant Mahāpadma.[79]

LOCAL IMAGERIES

That certain natural forces such as floods and snowstorms, and consequently famine, were endemic to the cultural geography of Kashmir is shown by how these phenomena creep into the very literary devices Kalhaṇa employs from time to time in his Kashmiri tale. Thus you have similes and analogies invoking the imagery of, for instance, 'rice-land when the crop is ruined by hail and only stalks survive (*karakābhranṣitaphalā stambhaśeṣeva śālibhūḥ*)'[80] to describe an army that has lost morale or that of 'a brimming lake when it overflows upon the bursting of the dam in the rains (*pālibhaṅge*

taṭasyeva prāvṛṭapūrṇasya lakṣyatām)'[81] to describe the appearance of the forces collected by one Lothaka who had long been plotting against the king Jayasiṁha.

Other attributes and associations culturally specific to Kashmir are sprinkled all over the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, imbuing a classic Sanskrit *kāvya* with a very special local flavour, as well as pointing to ways in which Kashmir was distinguishable from other spaces. Most of these occur as minor detailing and incidental inputs, often, again, as part of evocative similes or imageries, and sometimes mixed with formulaic flourishes. However, in each case they appear as more or less self-conscious touches, which is significant for gauging the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as an expression of regional selfhood. Clearly, *Sanskrit could serve regionalized worlds and constitute the local even though it transcended it.*

These Kashmiri adaptations of literary devices helped vivify the natural and cultural landscape of Kashmir, bringing an unmistakably sensorial and experiential dimension to it. There are dozens of these observations in the text; suffice it to sample a few here. Thus early in the very first *taraṅga* Kalhaṇa composes the following miscellany of novel attributes:

> Such is Kashmir, the country which may be conquered by the force of spiritual merit but not by armed force; where the inhabitants in consequence fear more the next world; where there are hot baths in winter, comfortable landing places on the river banks, where the rivers being free from aquatic animals are without peril; where, realizing that the land created by his father is unable to bear heat, the hot-rayed sun honours it by bearing himself softly even in summer.[82] Learning, high dwelling houses, saffron, iced water, grapes and the like—what is a commonplace there is difficult to secure in paradise.[83]

The reference to surpassing paradise (*tridiva*) is striking for it anticipates the later-day construction of Kashmir as a paradisical space itself in Persian literature. The verse also suggests a combined claim to piety and pleasures for the land, which, though not uncommon to *kāvya* descriptions, is a characterization also to be found in the *Nīlamata* where Kashmir is described as both holy and charming (*ramṇīyaśca puṇyaśca*)'.[84] Above all, by compiling this highly place-specific and phenomenological eulogy of Kashmir, Kalhaṇa seems also to be *fashioning a community of local sentiment*: an ecology elaborated as a homeland.

The same may be said of other descriptions inspired by natural markers specific to Kashmir's montane ecology and temperate clime, such as 'the verdure of undulating trees', 'delightful resin of the pines, and [the Valley's appearance] 'gleaming like a dish of yoghurt on an auspicious occasion'.[85] In a similar vein appear references to fruits and vegetables unique to Kashmir, namely cherries (*kapittha*), described as 'which but for a few days are produced in Kashmir at the advent of the clouds',[86] *utpalasāka*, a bitter green leafy vegetable (*hak* in Kashmiri) that grows wild in the Valley,[87] and lotus root (*bisam*), a delicacy in local cuisine.[88] Similarly, there are references to fried meat,

described as 'the soft and unctuous fare of Kashmir which is easy to digest when washed down with sugared water'.[89] Notable also is the reference to the *kakṣāgni* (*kangri*), the Kashmiri fire-pot used for body warmth in winters, the glowing and dying embers in which are used as an evocative analogy for human endeavours.[90] Then there is the reference to shawls (*nicola*),[91] the stock-in-trade of Kashmiris to this day, and to long woollen blankets worn by country people.[92] Similarly, Kashmiri load carriers (*bhāragrahā*, *rūḍhabhāroḍhi*) on their difficult ascent uphill[93] are mentioned, as are water mills and hand mills,[94] and bathing huts and boat bridges on the Vitastā's front.[95]

To be sure, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is a political and, if anything, an ethical commentary. Therefore, it does not dwell on these motifs. However, it is precisely the incidental yet prolific manner in which these keep cropping up in the narrative that yields a conspicuous local infusion in the text. Thus, among analogies the following are instances of Kashmiri cultural signifiers invoked in the service of literary expression: 'The saffron flower (*kuṅkum*) is without a stem, the *kṣirīn* (fig tree[96]) bears fruit without a blossom, so do high-souled men secede from desire without the passage of years (that is, without aging).'[97] In a different mood is this analogy: 'With the dead, whose bodies swollen being soaked in water, the surface of the streams was covered as if by piles of cut timber gliding from the mountains.'[98] Or 'In that rebellion, massed bands of the Ḍāmaras (landowning chiefs) came swarming in thousands from all directions like wasps emerging from earth holes upon the melting of snow.'[99] Or 'This evil rumour with its small beginning in the camp assumed serious proportions in the capital, like a storm gust from a mountain gorge is magnified when it reaches the wilderness.'[100] Or 'The Ḍāmara horde was ready to swoop down like a glacier at the touch of heat.'[101] Similarly, you have a reference to the fall of a pilgrim off the banks of a *tīrtha* through a landslide.[102]

KINGDOM OF PIETY OR *THIS TROUBLED LAND*

The movement from physical qualities of space to spiritual ones is effected as a continuum in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, as I observed earlier. Claim to spiritual distinctiveness is made early and unequivocally in the form of direct statements such as 'the country which may be conquered by spiritual merit, not armed force'[103] (*vijīyate puṇyabalairbalairyattu na śastriṇām*) and 'this kingdom [is] held in veneration by the gods, *tīrtha*s and *ṛṣi*s'.[104] However, that the spiritual characterization of Kashmir had a political purpose and meaning also becomes clear fairly early and, again, draws on the *Nīlamata*'s mythological exegesis of the true identity of Kashmir, namely that it is goddess Pārvatī herself. Accordingly, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* has no less than lord Kṛṣṇa state: 'The land of Kashmir is Pārvatī; know its king to be part of Śiva (*rājā jñeyo*

harāṃśajaḥ). He should not be disregarded even if he be wicked, by a wise man desirous of bliss.'[105]

We also find all kings from the first to literally the last assiduously painted in colours of piety in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. This depiction had two components: rhetorical, wherein kings were described as 'pure minded' (*śuddhadhīḥ*), 'he who loved a life of good conduct', 'kept himself far away from sinfulness', 'the crest-jewel of Śiva worshippers', and so on;[106] and practical, wherein the many pious donations and constructions (*puṇyā pratiṣṭhā*)[107] sponsored by every single king, king after king—and often by their queens, other kin, and councillors[108]—are singled out for mention and detailed *ad nauseum*.[109] These included the founding of temples, *maṭha*s (Hindu monasteries), *vihāra*s (Buddhist monasteries), *stūpa*s (Buddhist relic shrines), and *agrahāra*s (brahmana villages) as well as the frequent consecration of anicons such as *bāṇaliṅga*s (stones shaped as a Śaiva phallus) and tridents, as well as colossal bodhisattvas, the names of scores of which are found littered across the text just as their objects seem to have littered the Kashmiri landscape. Together these represent manmade sacred geography that made dense the sacred terrain outlined by the natural *tīrtha*s.

It is instructive to note the sectarian plurality of these royal enterprises which were Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Bauddha, and also Saura by affiliation. Though simultaneous multiple patronage is hardly unique to early and early-medieval Kashmir,[110] it is not given anywhere quite the recognition by historians that it deserves. Not only is Kalhaṇa at ease with inscribing the space of Kashmir with this plurality,[111] it points to another kind of diversity, ethnic, that also inhabited elite sections of this space in the early medieval period. For, behind the patronage of Buddhism and also Śaivism were often Tuhkhāras (such as Cankuna), Turuṣkas (such as Kaniṣka), Śāhīs (such as Queen Vasantalekhā), people of Lo or Tibet (such as Stonpā) and of Prāgjyotiṣa or Assam (like Queen Amṛtaprabhā/lekhā),[112] and other such non-Kashmiri groups who were nonetheless a part of the Kashmiri ruling class. (See also Chapter 4, the section on 'Text'.)

The other point to note about royal sacred building activities is that they tended to cluster. While any number of new foundations were certainly inaugurated at new places across the Valley, usually named after the royal individual having it built, certain *tīrtha*s or pilgrimage sites, prominent among which were Vijayeśa, Cakradhara, Nandīśa, Tripureśa, and Bhūteśa (modern Bhutsar), appear as dominating the hierarchy. They show a noticeable continuity in that they were serially patronized down the dynasties, successive kings or queens making additions to the shrine, such as gilding the parasol or constructing a new chamber, or restoring old structures, or enhancing the endowment for their upkeep.[113] We may, therefore, speak of both a diffused and accretionary pilgrimage economy.

So pervasive, indeed compulsive, does this practice of piety appear in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* that even kings and queens of iconic *impiety*—those presented as unscrupulous in the extreme or mindless, massacring tyrants such as Mihirakula, Kalaśa, and Diddā—are recorded as making donations to temples and *vihāra*s. This drives even Kalhaṇa to comment on the incongruity thus: 'Even sinners, it is a marvel! have a peculiar longing to do good acts' (*pāpināmapi hanteyam kāpi satkarmavāsanā*).[114]

The explanation appears to have been quite simply that these ritual acts were really political acts. As a scholar has put it, theism (especially of the Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas), with its liturgy of images and temples, was instituted as hegemonic in the definition of kingship in early Kashmir.[115] Thus royal sacred constructions were meant not just typically for divine legitimation of rule but as part of other kinds of political communication. For example, appearing to right the wrongs perpetrated by the previous ruler, King Uccala restored the shrines spoiled and looted by King Harṣa, whom he had deposed.[116] Conversely, claiming the legacy and mantle of great rulers of the past, King Jayasiṁha completed the consecrations initiated by Kings Lalitāditya and Avantivarman centuries before him.[117]

These religious establishments seem to have played yet another role in Kashmir which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* uniquely evokes. This was the fact that the sacred sanctuary also doubled as political sanctuary, an asylum of sorts where kings, sometimes complete with their militia, took refuge either in the troubled course of their tenure or as the ultimate place of rest or recuperation from illness at the end of their reign. A number of abdicating or dying kings, renunciant princes, invalid ministers and generals are described as retiring to *tīrtha*s like Vijayeśa, Varāhakṣetra, and Cakradhara.[118]

More incongruously, these sanctuaries became veritable theatres of war when ousted kings, rebels, or truant courtiers on the run took shelter within their ramparts; thus the holy shrines of Vijayeśa and Sureśvarī became the site for competing claims to the throne of Kashmir when Sussala and Garga (representing King Uccala) and later Sussala and King Bhikṣācāra clashed there.[119] The Kashmiri subjects, who often found themselves caught in the midst of civil war and insurrection, are also on one occasion described as fleeing to the safety of Cakradhara *tīrtha*.[120] A notch less, the *tīrtha* also emerges as a site for political protest and negotiation when priest conclaves, in a practice apparently special to Kashmir, organize sit-ins and hunger strikes (*aṇgśana*) at such befitting venues against royal inaction or actions.[121]

Thus the spiritual land of Kashmir as represented appears also as a troubled land, 'a country which delighted in insurrection' (*upaplavapriya deśa*), 'a realm unhappy through its own factions' (*svabhedavidhuram maṇḍalam*),[122] as Kalhaṇa stoically informs us. (These pithy phrases that he coins, one notes, have an uncanny resonance

for present-day Kashmir, calling to mind perhaps the epigram that 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'.[123]) The troubled land of Kashmir in this sense was the antithesis of that political principle closest to Kalhaṇa's heart, namely a strong monarchy. Hence Kalhaṇa's painstaking and marathon reportage of the various players and factors that weakened kings and kingship and with which he populates the political space of Kashmir.[124] Briefly, these included the militiamen, the Tantrins, and unruly landed elements, the Ḍāmaras, on the one hand, who often took to arms and joined rebel conspirators or enemy forces. On the other hand, brahmana activists of the kind that organized mass hunger strikes against the king are also caricatured and lampooned by Kalhaṇa who presents them as insincere or pompous knaves and cowards.[125]

Most of all, it is the courtiers (*mantrin*) and official functionaries (*kāyastha*) as a class who are attacked by Kalhaṇa for 'robbing the subjects' and being the pestilence of the people (*prajārogāḥ*)[126] by taking bribes, extracting heavy taxation even in drought, and embezzling funds due for the treasury. He also detests them for their sycophancy, love of intrigue and calumny, treachery, and licentious lifestyles.[127] Finally and most importantly, it is a series of dissolute Kashmiri kings themselves whom Kalhaṇa documents with all the concern and contempt at his disposal, as we saw in Chapter 2. Moral corruption then is seen as the bane of the administration of Kashmir across time and the cause of the Kashmiri people's endless woes. This is what Kalhaṇa's highly ethicized commentary, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, revolves around.

The imagined landscape of Kashmir—pristine, holy, spiritual—is thus set off against the unholy and troubled contretemps occurring therein. *Geography and polity are brought together in stunning contrast*, which is built into the unified poetic scheme. The clash between the nature of the land and the strife amidst its people could not have been lost on Kalhaṇa; it essays the mixed feelings with which he seems to have undertaken to represent his country, feelings of 'love woven with shame and sorrow' (*snehalajjāśokānvitaḥ*).[128] More significantly, it attests how physical and cultural geography could be synergistically implicated in a political critique in the process of giving expression to the history and identity of a region.

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[1] Yigal Bronner and David Shulman have written about 2nd millennium Sanskrit poetry participating along with the vernaculars in elaborating distinct regional identities ('A Cloud Turned Goose: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millennium', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43, no. 1 [2006]: 1–30). Pollock in a sense admits this when he writes about Dhoyī's *Pavanadūta*, which gives an account of Bengal, that 'it is the region that has now begun to count, even for the writer of cosmopolitan Sanskrit' ('Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out' in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Pollock [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004], p. 106).

[2] B. N. Kachru, *Kashmiri Literature*, vol. VIII, fasc. 4 of *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Goda (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), p. 14.

[3] For a discussion on the character of Kashmiri as a language, see Chapter 4, the section on Language.

[4] Quoted in B. N. Kachru, 'The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris: Kashmiri Literary Culture and Language', in *The Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture*, ed. Aparna Rao (Delhi: Manohar, 2008), p. 326.

[5] According to Daniela Bredi, Urdu was adopted by Srinagar when the majority speak Kashmiri 'as a concession to the state's Muslim majority, Urdu being the identity symbol of the Muslims' ('Urdu in Kashmir, Urdu in India', *Rivista Di Studi Sudasiatici* 4 [2009]: 109). Though the equation between religion and language may be problematic, Bredi's observation may also explain why separatist movements in present-day Kashmir do not invoke Kashmiri when raising the call for self-determination, despite language being the commonest ground for such demands historically.

[6] M. Ashraf Bhat, *The Changing Language Roles and Linguistic Identities of the Kashmiri Speech Community* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), dust jacket.

[7] The other such articulation is the 7th-century *Nīlamatapurāṇa*.

[8] See Sheldon Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (1998): 6–37.

[9] Writing about the polar positions taken by the 20th-century translators of the text, Chitralekha Zutshi observes that Stein presented the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a regional text while Pandit claimed it as national *kāvya* literature ('Translating the Past: Rethinking *Rajatarangini* Narratives in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 1 [2011]: 5–27). While she is right in noting their respective orientalist and nationalist locations as being responsible for this, what she misses is that both their positions on the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* may also belong in the text itself.

[10] Diana Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony Books, 2011), p. 1.

[11] Eck, *India*, p. 53.

[12] An exception would be Kumkum Roy's 'The Making of a Maṇḍala: The Fuzzy Frontiers of Kalhaṇa's Kashmir', in *Negotiating India's Past: Essays in Memory of Parthasarthi Gupta*, eds B. Pati, B. P. Sahu, and T. K. Venkatasubramaniam (Delhi: Tulika Books, 2003), pp. 52–66. She, however, reads the mythical connections asserted in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* between Kashmiri kings and the *Mahābhārata* war, for example, as just another instance of a 'periphery' seeking legitimation from the 'centre'. My own concern would be how Kashmir was being constructed as a Centre in itself. See Chapter 4.

[13] *RT* VII.979.

[14] *RT* IV.611–13.

[15] *RT* IV.104.

[16] For example, *RT* VII.979.

[17] *RT* VII.991, 1261.

[18] *RT* VII.1181.

[19] *RT* VIII.1531.

[20] *RT* VIII.924. Kalhaṇa decries some Kashmiri forces who, because of an alliance between the Kashmiri usurper Bhikṣācāra, the Turuṣkas, and the Khaśas against Sussala, the king of Kashmir, had fought against 'the lord of their own race (*kulaprabhu*)'.

[21] *RT* VII.978.

[22] For more on Kashmiri identity, see Chapter 4.

[23] Pandit's somewhat uncertain translation. *Svadeśoyam videśoyamiti buddheḥ pravartakaḥ anvayavyatirekābhyām sthityabhyāsaḥ śarīriṇām* (*RT* IV.606).

[24] To give a few instances of when this seems to have happened: *RT* II.145; III.100; IV.163, 177, 184, 519; V.136, 232; VI.352–3; VII.218, 267, 575–7, 991; VIII.626–8.

25 In this context it is worth noting modern historian Mridu Rai's assertion that the formation of the Dogra kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir by the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 was an unnatural and unprecedented grouping of regions that lacked any shared experience ('"To Tear the Mask Off the Face of the Past": Archaeology and Political Protest in Jammu and Kashmir', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46, no. 3 [2009]: 407). As this book shows, the sub-divisions of Jammu and Kashmir have had connected histories, not only cultural but also political, from the beginning of the 1st millennium CE.

26 See Anne Feldhaus for how the Godavari plays a similar role in conceptions of Maharashtra. *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage and Geographical Imagination* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

27 *RT* II.15; IV.617; V.87.

28 *RT* I.25–7.

29 This is the explication found in the *Nīlamata Purāṇa*, verse 226.

30 N. J. Allen, 'And the Lake Drained Away: An Essay in Himalayan Comparative Mythology', in *Mandala and Landscape*, ed. A. W. Macdonald (Delhi: DK Printworld, 1996), pp. 435–51. The myth is also found in Tibet and Khotan in China.

31 See G. S. Gaur, 'Semthan Excavation: A Step towards Bridging the Gap between the Neolithic and the Kushan Period in Kashmir', in *Archaeology and History: Essays in Memory of A. Ghosh*, vol. I (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakshan, 1987), p. 327.

32 Gaur, 'Semthan Excavation', p. 327.

33 *RT* I.28.

34 *RT* I.29. Wendy Doniger (ed.), *Purana Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 175.

35 Feldhaus, *Connected Places*, pp. 18, 21.

36 *RT* I.31.

37 *RT* I.95, 92.

38 Eck, *India*, p. 36.

39 *RT* I.43.

40 *RT* I.57.

41 Eck, *India*, p. 34.

42 *RT* I.32–8.

43 *RT* I.33.

44 Edward Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 274.

45 *RT* I.159 (efforts of King Dāmodara II), IV.191 (King Lalitāditya's attempts).

46 *RT* VII.1186.

47 *RT* V. 270–3; VII.906, 1632.

48 *RT* V.90, 113, 114–15.

49 *RT* V.97–8. King Lalitāditya too diverted the waters of the Vitastā at Cakradhara and constructed a series of water wheels on them for the villages.

50 *RT* V.105–6, 109–12.

[51] *RT* V.72.

[52] *RT* I.239; II.17–26; VI.125; VIII.1037, 1043, 1092, 2449, 2520, 2681.

[53] *RT* VII.1373–4.

[54] *RT* VII.1392.

[55] *RT* VIII.2520.

[56] *RT* VIII.1037.

[57] *RT* II.17–26.

[58] *RT* I.239; III.21–4.

[59] Julia Shaw, 'Nāga Sculptures in Sanchi's Archaeological Landscape: Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Local Agricultural Cults in Central India, First Century BCE to Fifth Century CE', *Artibus Asiae* 64, no. 1 (2004): 5–59.

[60] *RT* I.171–86.

[61] *RT* VIII.111.

[62] *RT* I.220–2.

[63] Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, *The River of Kings*, p. 34, fn 220.

[64] *RT* VIII.1007.

[65] For a speculative interpretation of *nāga*s and *piśāca*s as human tribes, see R. S. Bisht, 'Reflections on Burzahom and Semthan: Excavations and Later Mythological Periods in Kashmir Valley', in *Central Asia and Western Himalayas: A Forgotten Link*, ed. G. M. Buth (Srinagar, 1986), pp. 56–7.

[66] *RT* I.265, 270.

[67] Some other examples: *RT* II.57–8; IV. 263, 511, 550.

[68] Stuart Blackburn, *Moral Fictions: Tamil Folktales in Oral Tradition*, Folklore Fellows Communications, vol. CXXVIII, no. 278, Helsinki, 2001.

[69] For *vārta*, see *RT* I.334–5, *śruti* and *janaśruti RT* VI.3016 and VII.133. In this connection a suggestion by Whitney Cox may assume special significance. Cox hypothesized a Sanskrit genre peculiar to Kashmir called the *śloka kathā* (tale in couplet form), of which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* would also be an example (Cox, 'Literary Register and Historical Consciousness', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2: 131–60. Though in his construction this would be a duly literary, not folk, genre, I believe its significance may lie in hitting upon what I have called the civilizational centrality of storytelling in Kashmir.

[70] Chitralekha Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts: Narratives, Sacred Geographies, and the Historical Imagination* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 246–7.

[71] One *yojana* is equal to 8 miles or approximately 13 kilometres.

[72] *RT* I.258–65.

[73] *RT* I.267–8.

[74] *RT* I.269, 272.

[75] See Plato's Myths in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2009/14, online resource: www.plato.stanford.edu. Last accessed in June 2014.

[76] Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Place, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford, USA: Berg Publishers, 1994), p. 33.

77 Kalhaṇa says of Kashmir: ‘This country which has violent floods from the waters of the Mahāpadma lake and is intersected with streams had ever small produce’, *RT* V.68.

78 *RT* IV.592–7.

79 *RT* IV.605–14.

80 *RT* IV.295.

81 *RT* VIII.2800.

82 There is a reference to ‘the very delightful summer of Kashmir’ also in *RT* II.138.

83 *RT* I.39–42.

84 *Nīlamata Purāṇa*, verse 206.

85 *RT* III.225–6.

86 *RT* IV.237.

87 RT V.48.

88 RT VIII. 676.

89 *RT* VIII.1863, 66.

90 *RT* VIII 221.

91 *RT* I.207.

92 *RT* VIII.857.

93 *RT* VII.841, 1088; VIII.1331.

94 *RT* VII.1292.

95 *RT* VIII.1182.

96 *Kṣirīn* is not translated by either Pandit or Stein. By its description, it may refer to the fig tree. Personal communication from Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani.

97 *RT* VIII.3078. The translation is mine.

98 *RT* VII.1222.

99 *RT* VII.1318.

100 *RT* VIII.255.

101 *RT* VIII.661.

102 *RT* VIII.2904.

103 Echoed in Mātṛgupta’s words (*RT* III.293): ‘None dare do us injury by superior might.’

104 *RT* VII.1243.

105 *RT* I.72. One early, probably mythical king Jalauka is directly compared with Nandīśa (Śiva) and said to have attained communion with the god at Cirmocana (*RT* I.130, 152).

106 For example, *RT* I.90, 91, 154–5 to VIII.2379–80.

107 *RT* III.99.

108 See, for example, Jayasiṁha’s reign wherein his wives, friends, and courtiers together with him seem to be running an empire of piety, so constant and prolific are their donative and building efforts (*RT* VIII.2402–41).

109 It will not be an exaggeration to say that this category of information is the single largest in the text and completely dominates Kalhaṇa's reportage. This may be because the grant charters (*śāsana*, *praśasti*) to which Kalhaṇa referred were numerous. However, their occurrence in large numbers would itself be telling.

110 The best example of this is the reign of Lalitāditya (*RT* IV.181–217).

111 This plurality need not be equated with inclusivity, though, since we do get instances of latent tension between groups, for example, vis-à-vis Buddhists and possibly between Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas.

112 *RT* II.147–8; III.9–10.

113 *RT* I.105; V.46, 55; VI.183–5; VII.524, 952, 956; VIII.580, 2363–5, 2379–80, 3316–17, 3356, 3364–5. The most massive sacred constructions are reported for Lalitāditya's reign (*RT* IV.181–217).

114 See *RT* I.305–7; IV.137; VI. 295–309; VII. 121, 524. Kalhaṇa calls the brahmanas who accepted land donations from Mihirakula, the lowest brahmanas, '*adhamadvija*' (*RT* I.305).

115 Ronald Inden, 'Imperial Purāṇas: Kashmir as a Vaiṣṇava Centre of the World', in *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, eds Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 90.

116 *RT* VIII.78–80.

117 *RT* VIII.2400. In a similar vein Jayasiṁha's queen, Raddādevī, is said to have restored the temple founded by Aśoka (*RT* VIII.3391).

118 *RT* VII.186–7, 256–9, 269; VIII.179, 437.

119 *RT* VIII.509, 744–8. The following episode spells out the sense of immunity surrounding sanctuaries which made them fitting asylums: '[Citraratha] thought no harm would befall him from the king if he, though guilty, lived in a sanctuary. [So] under the pretext of wishing to die, he proceeded to Sureśvarī' (*RT* VIII.2344).

120 Ironically, the timber palisades of the fortress surrounding the *tīrtha* were set on fire and thousands of refugees perished. This is described in *RT* VIII.971–92. There is an earlier instance in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of people taking refuge in Cakradhara and the shrine burning down (*RT* I.259).

121 *RT* VIII.898–9, 2733.

122 *RT* VIII.1804, II.7.

123 This is the famous French epigram by Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in the 1849 issue of his journal *Les Guespes*. The original reads: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

124 See Shonaleeka Kaul, 'Kingship in Early Kashmir: New Perspectives from the Rājataraṅgiṇī', in *Images of the Past: Essays in Honour of BD Chattopadhyaya*, eds Osmund Bopearacchi and Suchandra Ghosh (Delhi: Primus, forthcoming).

125 See for example *RT* VI.336; VIII.772, 898–908, 939. Kalhaṇa does at other places represent brahmanas as agents of concern for the larger welfare of the kingdom and flag-bearers of resistance to tyranny (*RT* IV.631–53; VII. 400–1).

126 *RT* VI.136.

127 For example, *RT* IV.321, 621, 623; V.180–1, 229, 378–9; VI.155–6; VII.1216–27; VII.100–1, 106–11, 1120, 1136; VIII.86–92, 862, 870–2, 880, 1612, 2032. There is a great deal that Kalhaṇa has to say against courtiers who acted 'as *rājā* and *rājānaka* both' (kings and courtiers) (*RT* VI.117).

128 Here I read Kalhaṇa's own state of mind into his description of abdicated King Ananta and Queen Sūryamatī. On hearing of the doings of their debauched son Kalaśa, the new king of Kashmir, the couple 'wept … through love woven with shame and sorrow' (*RT* VII.318).

CHAPTER FOUR

(Re)locating Early Kashmir

Geoculture of a Region and Beyond

> *The shared commons that we choose to call a regional way of life is only ever relationally and discursively constituted.*
>
> —*Ash Amin*

Apart from questions of history and landscape, the third main interest behind the textual reinterpretation of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* that this book represents is the question of early Kashmir's cultural location and identity. In other words, we look to understand the regional identity claimed for and by this land, as well as the traditions that shaped this identity, until the early medieval period. A historical region—a unit of a geographical, political, or cultural character—is, by definition, a relational term. It can be spoken of in explicit or implicit association or contrast with other regions and, most often, a supra-region. In Kashmir's case, there is a special need to pose this question of the relational location of the region. That need derives from the main impression that the Valley seems to have left on popular and scholarly imagination, namely that of its isolation,[1] a view suggested more by its surrounding high mountain topography perhaps, than by its historical reality attested multiply by all manner of sources, as this chapter will show.

From 'isolation' to 'insularity' and a consequential 'uniqueness' has been but a short step in the assumptive characterization of ancient Kashmir. Sample this representative statement: 'The Himalayan Valley of Kashmir … [has been] geographically *secluded* from the rest of South Asia. Its geographic situation, bounded on all sides by high mountains, has led to an *insularity* that contributed to the development of its *unique* cultural characteristics' (emphasis added).[2] This conviction about Kashmir's splendid, if imaginary, isolation has in turn tied in neatly with ideas of 'peripherality'—a notion thought to apply to any region that lay on the outliers of the historical formation that flourished along the Gangetic Valley from the 6th century BCE onwards, which is construed as the 'Centre'.

Peripherality is used to imply a great distance, literal and figurative, from the Centre. That this is itself a view from the Centre, privileging it in historical processes,

is not noticed by those looking to ascribe acculturative and hegemonizing tendencies to the relationship between the Indic heartland and everywhere else. This evolutionist position suggests a passivity to outlying regions in their historical emergence and development as also an understanding of cultural processes, mechanisms, and choices as top-down (also hand-me-down), expropriative, static, and unilinear.

A recent study of the *Nīlamata Purāṇa* applies this approach to early Kashmir.[3] It essentially replays the influential materialist scholarship on the *Purāṇas*, according to the most cogent theoretical statement of which by Vijay Nath, these texts were little more than an acculturative instrument for the imposition of 'mainstream civilization' and 'brahmanization' on 'tribal societies' to facilitate the spread of agriculture.[4] As Christopher Minkowski has put it, this is 'as if brahmins were a species of beneficial, exotic plant or insect'![5] Such a position is also highly reductive of a genre that was essentially an amorphous and heterogeneous compilation of free-floating oral narratives and encyclopaedic materials over centuries.[6]

The *Purāṇas* aside, some scholars have cautioned that concepts such as centre–periphery, hegemony, legitimation, acculturation, and indeed Sanskritization as the prime vehicle of such acculturation in the Indian subcontinent—all take-offs on hierarchy as the essential driving force behind socio-cultural processes—have become theoretical metonyms and surrogates for Indian civilization as a whole. As Arjun Appadurai puts it, they have become gate-keeping concepts thought to apply to every regional process, perhaps limiting thereby the full potential for apprehending what was in fact a complicated compound of local realities.[7] In this chapter, even as I adopt the paradigm of region and supra-region and explore the relationship between the two, I approach Kashmir as a culture region not through these unilineal and static concepts but vis-à-vis broad flows and movements—cultural transmission of a dynamic and wide-ranging nature that centred on early Kashmir.

FROM UNIQUE HISTORY TO CONNECTED HISTORIES

Long, long before it was engulfed by late 20th-century sectarian identity politics, where did Kashmir stand culturally? Adjoining Hellenistic, Iranian, Tibeto-Burman, and Indic cultural regimes, can it be seen as a cultural borderland in the first millennium CE?[8] As importantly, did it see *itself* as a borderland or as liminal in any sense? I believe the choices early Kashmir made that shaped its cultural identity and location were based on a very open and active, if uneven, historical interface with surrounding cultures. It came to master elements of one of these cultures, the Indic. Indic civilization, in turn, drew on Kashmir's learning and traditions to such a remarkable degree as to assign a centrality to Kashmir within the regional configuration in which it was situated.

A second and related aspect is that of the geographical location of Kashmir in the Western Himalayas. It is curious that among the large number of historical and anthropological studies on the Western Himalayas over the decades, the prominent majority, with their Buddhological/Tibetological bent, presume to refer to Ladakh, Himachal (Lahaul and Spiti), and Tibet as their subject area, and not Kashmir, even though by that limited parameter, too, the Kashmir Valley had a strong Buddhist tradition early on.[9] Though geographically very much nestled between the western-most Himalayan ranges, Zanskar and Pir Panjal, the Kashmir Valley as also the areas of Gilgit, Hunza, and Nagar further north in the shadow of the Karakoram are somehow tacitly understood to constitute a world of their own—a world about which, one may add, more assumptions circulate than facts. Historians, in particular, may have tended to exclude this iconic place from the regional grouping of the Western Himalayas because Kashmir is culturally thought to belong instead to a different regional formation altogether, one which, it is held, exerted a defining influence on her and was non-Himalayan and non-Indic in the main. I refer to what is increasingly now called the Indo-Iranian borderlands, the Indus–Oxus orbit or the Kabul–Gāndhāra complex but has traditionally been labelled the subcontinental North-West.[10]

In other words, whether it was conquests, commerce, or culture, the northern-most and north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent have typically been characterized in history as gateways or outward-looking highways to central and western Asia with the Hellenistic, Persian, Sogdian, or tribal histories of those areas. Therefore, the historical significance of early Kashmir,[11] or Gāndhāra and Punjab for that matter, is seen to lie in their access and exposure to non-Indic realms and affairs, thereby consigning them to a liminality or hybrid peripherality of the scholar's making.

In this chapter, without questioning the well-established incursion of Indo-Greek, Śaka, Pehlava, Kuṣāṇa, and Huna political elements into the region in the early historic period,[12] and notwithstanding Kashmir's contiguity or proximity to different culture zones, the range of evidence on hand leads one to question the assumption that early Kashmir somehow constituted a cultural hybrid, falling between a variety of hyphenated cultural regimes. In other words, this chapter interrogates the peripherality, both literal and figurative, vis-à-vis the Indic mainland that is presumptively attributed to Kashmir. Reinstating into view the Western Himalayas, it then considers the entire regional spread—from Gāndhāra and Ladakh to Jammu, Punjab, and Kashmir up to Himachal Pradesh—in terms of its connected histories and that of the Indic mainland.

Connected history is the perspective that regions do not come into being or exist in isolation but are entangled in a network of shaping interactions with other regions. Based on select cultural markers diagnostic of identity and movement in the early period, such as material culture, script, language, and art, and the common or

interwoven patterns and network that these throw up, this chapter argues for early Kashmir as the pivot of what appears to be formulatable as a distinct cultural configuration which nestled in the Western Himalayas but straddled the Himalayan–non-Himalayan, mountains–plains divide. This multi-faceted evidence of cross linkages and integration helps develop an understanding of regionality, and the relationship between region and supra-region, in terms of multilinear cultural transmission. Let us see how. We begin by turning again to the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and, thereafter, to non-textual testimonies.

TEXT

The *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as a whole maps so exhaustively the land of Kashmir that the incidental and diffused detailing throughout the text can be missed. Aurel Stein spent much of his energies piecing together precisely these micro-maps and tracing them on the ground in the Valley. However, what about lands beyond the Vale? Does the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* tell us anything about them or rather about Kashmir's relationship with them over the centuries it documents? In other words, can we ask questions about the geopolitics of early Kashmir, more so in relation to culture than politics and war, based on this text? And do these help us formulate a position about the cultural location of the region? It is well known that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* makes numerous references to Kashmir's proximate neighbours in different directions—Darads (Gilgit/Baltistan?), Tuhkhāras (Sogdia), Khaśas (Garhwal/Nepal), Bhauṭṭas (Ladakh), people of Lo (Tibet), Ṭakkas (north Punjab), Rājapurī (Rajouri), Parṇotsa (Poonch), Campā (Chamba), Darvābhisāra, and Trigarta (Kangra)—places mostly sharing in Kashmir's terrain and mountainous location. What comes as something of a surprise is the ample references to, and intensity of, Kashmir's long-distance linkages with the supra-region beyond, that is, interior India. The volume and variety of traffic and exchange between the valleys of the Vitastā and the Ganga, so to speak, deserve to be explored here.

One can speak of two kinds of representation of this relationship, one incidental but profuse and for both these reasons indicative of the traffic regarded as quite the norm; the other, somewhat more self-consciously put forth by Kalhaṇa and signalling thereby import or a statement. To the latter category belong the majority of references to Kashmir's political cross-currents or entanglements with the rest of the subcontinent, which took the form of conquests and military outreach, coups and counter-coups, diplomacy, and exile. We hear of more than one exogenous king of Kashmir, Aśoka Maurya (3rd century BCE) and his putative son Jalauka being two examples that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* mentions, apart from the Hunas Toramāṇa and Mihirakula (6th century CE). Toramāṇa is believed to be the father of Mihirakula; the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* reverses the order and inserts quite some distance in time between the two for some reason.[13]

Also, interestingly, it does not regard the Hunas as outsiders or as *mlecchas* (impure foreigner) and, instead, records the memory of Mihirakula as being the descendant of an earlier king of Kashmir, one who, though a tyrant, restored the religious order in Kashmir after it was overrun by the 'impious' Darads, Bhauṭṭas, and *mlecchas*.[14]

Needless to say, the rule of both dynasties, the Mauryas and the Hunas, as also the Kuṣāṇas was transregional and encompassed other parts of the Indian subcontinent (the Hunas extended to central India at their height and the Kuṣāṇas till central and east India, but of course neither was near the Mauryan empire in size or significance). Therefore, these constituted the first instances of Kashmir's inclusion in pan-Indian political formations. Aśoka is indeed credited by the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* with considerable significance in Kashmiri history via mention of the fact that he founded the city of Śrīnagarī, which remained the capital of Kashmir for the next two millennia.[15] Xuan Zang, the Buddhist traveller from China, who travelled all through Kashmir and into the plains of India in the 7th century CE, made the same claim about Aśoka. (For numismatic evidence in support of Mauryan presence in the Valley, see the section on Material Culture in this chapter.)

In the opposite direction of flow, we hear of the military expeditions of Jalauka against Kanyākubja; of Mihirakula right up to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), conquering on the way back the Colas, Karṇāta (Karnataka), and Lāṭa (Gujarat); and, in identical fashion, the conquests of Meghavāhana.[16] We also hear of conquests undertaken by later kings Pravarasena and Śankaravarman.[17] However, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* seems to treat Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa's 8th-century expeditions as the most notable of conquests and raids by Kashmiri kings in and against the Gangetic plains, including Kanyākubja (Kanauj), central and east India up to Kalinga and Bengal, as also the far south including Ceylon. See Map 2, Connected histories I.

HUNZA
GILGIT
SRINAGAR
BHAUTTAS
GANDHARA
RAJAPURI
JAMMU
CHAMPA
TRIGARTA
TAKKA
DELHI
MATHURA
KANAUJ
ALLAHABAD
SARNATH
NALANDA
VARANASI
GAYA
PRAGJYOTISHA
UDAYGIRI
GAUDA
SURASTRA
LATA
MALWA
INDIA
IKSHAVAKUS
KARNATA
CHOLAS

Map 2 Connected histories-I

Note: Map is not to scale; it is meant for broad, representational purposes only.

Indeed the text luxuriates in detailing the colossal bodhisattva statues (*bṛhad buddha*s), gleaming in bronze, that Lalitāditya brought back with him from Magadha (Bihar) following, presumably, its subjugation.[18] Kalhaṇa refers to how the mark of iron straps that were used to fasten the immense icons to the backs of elephants were visible on the pedestal 'even to this day'.[19] What is fascinating about this textual memory of a momentous transfer of an art work is that it tallies with the decided influence of the Pāla school of iconography of Bihar on the famed Kashmiri Buddhist bronze industry, the best examples of which were commissioned by, and survive to this day in, the monasteries of Tibet. See section on Art in this chapter for a little more on this.

Significantly, Lalitāditya is described as the universal (*sārvabhauma*) ruler whose intellect was beyond that of parochial kings (*prādeśikeśvara*).[20] That Kalhaṇa should make such a singular and sophisticated statement suggests a couple of important things. One, it speaks to a regional consciousness that aspired to transcend the regional rather than be a 'vernacular polity', with all the cultural limitations of the latter. Second, to Kalhaṇa's mind, Lalitāditya's reign may have coincided with that moment in Kashmir's history when the region was being constituted as a subcontinental 'Centre'. This attempt at a 'universal' sovereignty, whether real or ritual, may also be reflected in the field of early medieval Kashmiri religion, according to Ronald Inden. Inden identifies Lalitāditya as the king who is described as the conqueror of the entire earth and the greatest promulgator of Vaiṣṇavism in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (believed to have been produced in Kashmir in the 8th century CE). In the text's vision, the monarch's goal was to 'constitute a pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava kingship *as the paramount kingship of India*'.[21]

Nonetheless, scholars have wondered if the description of Lalitāditya's *digvijaya* (conquest of the quarters), which sometimes mirrors the itinerary of royal figures in classical literature such as Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁśam*,[22] is more rhetoric and symbol than fact.[23] The discovery, however, of large hoards of Lalitāditya's 'śrī pratāpa'[24] alloy coins in Aunjhar, Bhitware, Sarnath, and Rajghat (Uttar Pradesh) and Nalanda and Monghyr (Bihar)[25] should perhaps ameliorate such scepticism, especially for a king who was an avid expeditionist per se and seems to have ventured in similar grandiose fashion towards the northern and north-western direction as well, perhaps as deep as Iran and Sinkiang (?), though never to return.[26] See Image 1 Alloy coins of Lalitāditya.

Image 1 Alloy coins of Lalitāditya, circa 8th century CE. 'Śrī pratāpa' inscribed in Gupta Brāhmī. From Banda district, Uttar Pradesh.

Image courtesy of Shri Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar, India.

Be that as it may, were claims of conquest far afield merely rhetorical, especially when the conquest was over iconic cities such as Kanyākubja (Kanauj) that had become symbolic of imperiality over northern India in the 8th to 12th centuries, it would tend to show Kashmir's subscription to the cultural economy of the supra-region, a partaking and attempted appropriation of the symbols of political sovereignty erected and upheld by rest of the subcontinent or certainly a large part thereof. (This would mirror the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* itself drawing on pan-Indian Sanskritic ideals of politics, as discussed in Chapter 2.) This becomes all the more apparent in other instances we get in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of alleged descendants of the eponymous, legendary king Vikramāditya of Malwa, such as Pratāpāditya, or his aides/vassals, such as Mātṛgupta, ascending the throne of Kashmir *on the invitation of Kashmiri ministers*.[27] Again, this can be read literally and it would not be far-fetched that princes and protégés migrated between courts or were exhorted to do so. This was the stuff of political alliances and par for the early medieval course. However, it can also be seen as a self-styled claim to royal pedigree for Kashmiri kingship—but again by invoking an ideal (the just king Vikramāditya) that belonged to the north Indian politico-mythic universe.

Was this an attempt to seek legitimation by association? Perhaps, but that again would imply subscription to that ideological universe—or certainly to that idiom—especially by the community for whose consumption such claims were considered relevant. It is unlikely that a community or audience external to Kashmir was being primarily addressed—even by Kalhaṇa in his time (though the text of course may have circulated widely later), let alone by the Kashmiri courtiers of Pratāpāditya and Mātṛgupta who instated them on the throne.

It is in this light that reference to Kashmir and the *Mahābhārata* war in the *Nīlamata Purāṇa*, which is quoted by Kalhaṇa, can also be seen: as an idiomatic statement of belonging. Interestingly, however, it is not so simple, since the reference is to Kashmir's *absence* from the great war that seemed to engulf all other Indian polities worth their name.[28] This absence, which the texts seek to justify by invoking the very young age of their king at the time, has been interpreted by a scholar as a figurative admission of Kashmir's exclusion from affairs of the Gangetic valley, and by extension, from its cultural universe,[29] in other words, a return to the notion of a periphery. In this view, a retrospective attempt is therefore deemed necessary by later texts of Kashmir to gain legitimation by engineering some association to such a prestigious and defining event that seized the entire Middle Country.[30]

Persuasive though this is at first glance, it begs asking under what compulsion would the Kashmiri text be keen to record and thereby emphasize Kashmir's *absence* when they could simply ignore it, since the *Mahābhārata* war is quite immaterial to the story of the genesis of Kashmir that the *Nīlamata* proceeds to narrate (see Chapter 3, section 'Mapping the Land'). Such an on-the-fly stab at legitimation, that too by absentia, seems less rewarding an approach than understanding the reference as a part of the larger mythological prehistory that the Vaiṣṇava *Nīlamata*, and accordingly the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, lend the land of Kashmir. This prehistory, of which sage Kaśyapa is undoubtedly an important part, pivots, however, on the role of Kṛṣṇa in two major ways. First, in the founding of Kashmir by draining the waters of the *Satīsaras* (the lake of Satī) on Kaśyapa's behest, it is Kṛṣṇa and his brother, Balarāma, who do the needful in the presence of Śiva and other gods. Later, in a less illumined but highly charged political episode, Kṛṣṇa is seen deposing and killing Dāmodara I, the second named king of Kashmir, and anointing the latter's infant in his place and his widow Yaśovatī as queen-regent.

This is a fascinating story, not least because of the very early reference to rule by a woman in Kashmir, recalled centuries later by the rise to power of Queen Diddā. In our current context, however, it is riveting for how neatly it ties in with another strand of political mythography found in the *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa*, the 3rd-century *khila* or supplement to the *Mahābhārata*. The *Harivaṁśa* explicitly states that Kashmir was an ally of the kingdom of Magadha ruled by Jarāsaṁdha.[31] Jarāsaṁdha was the mighty arch-enemy and *bête noire* of Kṛṣṇa and, in fact, responsible for routing the Yādavas and driving them out of Mathura, whereupon they moved to Dwaraka. The *Harivaṁśa* mentions the king of Kashmir aiding in this rout. If this testimony of the *Harivaṁśa* be admissible, when correlated with the *Nīlamata* episode, we get a statement on Kashmir's active involvement in the politics of the Ganga valley in Puranic estimation. However, more than that, here is a cogent explanation for Kṛṣṇa's revenge against the Kashmiri king and the subsequent foreclosure of the possibility of a deracinated Kashmir's participation in the great war at Kurukṣetra that followed. Such an interpretation takes us beyond notions of periphery and centre and certainly beyond the label of periphery for Kashmir.

Returning from the *Nīlamata* to the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and to what appears to be Kashmir's dynamic outreach over the centuries, Kashmir and the rest of the subcontinent seem to have been connected not by rulership alone: Among other political crosscurrents, areas outside Kashmir appear as a source of coups and counter-coups fomented in the Valley as well. This would be routine and understandable when undertaken by neighbouring kingdoms with which Kashmir had chequered histories and some of which Kashmir invaded or was invaded by often, such as Rājapurī (Rajauri, Jammu), Campā (Chamba), Trigarta (Kangra), and Gāndhāra (Rawalpindi and

Peshawar plains). Kalhaṇa calls their rulers 'neighbouring chiefs who loved to foment disorder'. It is certainly remarkable, however, that kingdoms very far away and deep within India, such as Prāgjyotiṣa (Assam), Magadha (Bihar), and Gauḍa (Bengal) also seem to have been involved. The following three cases show the extent and complexity of Kashmir's long-distance enagagements.

Thus Meghavāhana (5th century CE), who we are told was the great-grandson of exiled king of Kashmir Yudhiṣṭhira I, is given asylum by the king of Gāndhāra. The king of Gāndhāra in time, sends him literally across the length of the Himalayas and indeed the width of the subcontinent to Prāgjyotiṣa for the *svayamvara* (marriage by election) of its princess. Successfully winning her hand, Meghavāhana returns to Gāndhāra loaded with wealth, the *chhatra* (royal parasol) of Viṣṇu (Prāgjyotiṣapura's royal ensign), and, curiously enough, the Tibetan guru (*lo-ston-pā*) of the Assamese king. Meghavāhana is then invited by the ministers of Kashmir to ascend the throne, which he does and inaugurates what seems to have been a Buddhist regime in its emphasis on *ahiṁsā* (non-injury) and in the large number of *vihāra*s (monasteries) constructed by the royal household, including by the *ston-pā*.[32] Nonetheless, King Meghavāhana also issued Śaiva coins, as will be discussed later.

We know less about the second case but it is nonetheless intriguing. Due to some obviously long-running enmity and competition, the king of Gauḍa was captured and assassinated at the orders of King Lalitāditya (8th century CE) when the former seemed to be visiting the Kashmiri *tīrtha* of Trigrāmī. Kalhaṇa tells us that this was apparently in breach of a promise of protection that Lalitāditya had made to him earlier. Kalhaṇa disapproves of this ethical lapse on the part of the monarch and, conversely, sings paeans to the bravery and fidelity of the deceased Bengali king's liegemen who travelled all the way from Gauḍa to Kashmir to seek revenge for their lord's murder in the face of their own certain death.[33]

The third case is of Bhikṣācāra (12th century CE), apparently a prince of Kashmir, the son of King Uccala, but who was cast away into the Vitastā as a newborn and miraculously rescued by a lady related to the Sāhī princesses of Gāndhāra, who took him abroad. Remarkably, we are told that he grew up in the Deccan where the Mālava king adopted him as his own son.[34] Of this marvellous and dubious origin story, Kalhaṇa says: 'Whether this was a fact or a fable, he gained so much in prestige that Fate itself could not have reduced him to insignificance.'[35] This Bhikṣācāra returns in full force later to fight one of the most intensely documented and protracted battles with King Sussala, his uncle, for the throne of Kashmir after the death of his father, Uccala.[36] Eventually he wins with the aid of an assortment of local power groups and ascends the throne.[37]

What emerges time and again from this discussion is that Kashmir's internal politics did not occur in isolation at all, nor was it perceived to have done so by the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*; instead, it appears across the centuries to have been a porous process and intricately tied up with other kingdoms. Perhaps this should not surprise us when one considers that several queens of Kashmir were also drawn by marriage alliance from remote regions. Thus, Raṇārambhā, said to be the adopted daughter of the Cola king Ratisena (Tamil Nadu), was married to King Raṇāditya or Tuñjina of Kashmir, while Amṛtaprabhā, the princess of Prāgjyotiṣa, was married to Meghavāhana, as we have seen; prince Toramāṇa was married to an Īkṣvāku princess; princesses of Jālaṁdhara are also mentioned as the wives of King Anantadeva while King Sussala is married to the granddaughter of the ruler of Kālañjara, and Queen Diddā, who ascended the throne of Kashmir in the 10th century, was herself born of a Sāhī mother (Gāndhāra).[38]

This cosmopolitan nature of the Kashmiri royalty, kings and queens alike, is complemented by an eclectic composition of other ruling elites. The Tuhkhāra chief minister and spiritual advisor of the cosmopolitan king Lalitāditya, by the name of Cankun, is of course widely cited in histories of Kashmir.[39] Less known are King Jayāpīḍa's chamberlain, Pramoda, described as the ruler of Mathura, King Anantadeva's jester, Dallaka from 'the plains', and the same king's ministers and confidantes, Keśava from Trigarta and Padmarāja probably from Malwa.[40] While a *rājaputra* (prince) from Campā fought in the war for succession in Kashmir, Keśin from Karṇāṭa was in the royal service under King Harṣa. Indeed the dynamic, if quixotic, King Harṣa, Kalhaṇa notes, introduced Kannada couture in the royal court and also a new coin type depicting the elephant, an emblem as far removed from Kashmiri ecology and imagination as possible! At Harṣa's court was also a minister Lakṣmīdhara from Ṭakka (north Punjab).[41] See Map 2 Connected histories-I.

While regional courts attracting courtiers from far and wide may not be unheard of in early medieval India, in Kashmir we may be looking at a society-wide phenomenon, to put it somewhat dramatically. For we hear of not only courtiers but also commoners, and not only brahmanas but also a potentially mixed bag of individuals coming to Kashmir from outside in pursuit of their vocations, namely Bengali students from Gauḍa, magicians from Drāviḍadeśa (south India), graziers from Khaśa (Nepal), prostitutes 'from different countries sold by a Turk', traders and 'baniyas' from Rauhitaka and Ṭakka (Haryana and Punjab), and artisans and horse dealers 'from the plains'.[42] Lalitāditya and Jayāpīḍa in particular are said to have 'gathered from many lands various learned men'.[43] And of course there are the common references to brahmanas and *bhikṣu*s from 'the plains' or from 'Madhyadeśa' and 'Āryadeśa' (Gangetic plains), as also from Gāndhāra in one instance and from Drāviḍa country,

Surāṣṭra (Kathiawad), and Lāṭa in others, being settled in fair numbers by several kings in the Valley or flocking to it on their own.[44] In one instance we do get a reference to 'all four castes' being imported from Kanyākubja. All this has significant, if immeasurable, demographic implications for understanding the roots and composition of Kashmiri society. It also seems to question acculturation as a suitable lens to view Sanskrit literature produced in Kashmir. To a society constituted in such fashion, the cultural choice of Sanskritic genres and modes for speaking about their homeland would have been endogenous and not alien and inflicted, as the acculturation perspective would suggest.

All in all, we are not looking at only rhetorical claims of Kashmir's connectivity with the Indic supra-region; there were real, material entanglements on display. It is little wonder then that when ministers or even kings of Kashmir retired from work, or more commonly left on exile, they typically turned India-ward, travelling to and settling in the iconic cities of the Indian plains. For instance, King Jayāpīḍa went to Prayāga on being ousted from the throne, and Kings Kalaśa and Mātṛgupta following abdication went to Banaras, as did Harṣa's minister Kandarpa and his vocalist Kanaka in their own difficult times.[45]

What is significant is that they were not the only Kashmiris to do so. Apparently the frequency of Kashmiris pilgrimaging to Gaya (Bihar) for performing ritual obsequies was so high that, Kalhaṇa tells us, a 9th-century Kashmiri minister secured tax exemption from the local ruler for all Kashmiris at that renowned centre of salvation (*kaśmīrikānām yaḥ śrāddhaśulkocchettā gayāntare*).[46] In similar fashion, we hear of a rest house exclusively for Kashmiris at Vankala.[47] Though incidental references in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, these are telling episodes. For one, these capture the regularity of traffic between Kashmir and a *tīrtha* deep in the lower Gangetic plains, joining together in a common ritual–cultural space regions that were separated by a thousand miles. In what was not a unilinear flow, the Śāradā pīṭha in Kashmir was frequented by pilgrims from as far as Gauḍa in the 8th century and regarded as one of the three most important pilgrimage centres of India as reported by Al beruni in the 11th century.[48]

All of this, then, exemplifies Diana Eck's theory of pilgrims charting a unified sacred geography called India (the most famous of these pilgrims would be Śankarācārya who is, of course, said to have come to Kashmir as well, founding the Śankarācārya temple at the site of the older Jyeṣṭheśvara temple in Srinagar, which exists till today). It also simultaneously qualifies Walter Slaje's contention that Kashmiris did not get to travel such great distances for cultic purposes.[49] Moreover, these incidents point to the existence and assertion, if not also clout, of a distinct Kashmiri citizen-identity amidst its Indic strands and milieu, a pointer again to the

interface between the local and the universal, which has been the running thread in our investigations. This observation bears emphasis.

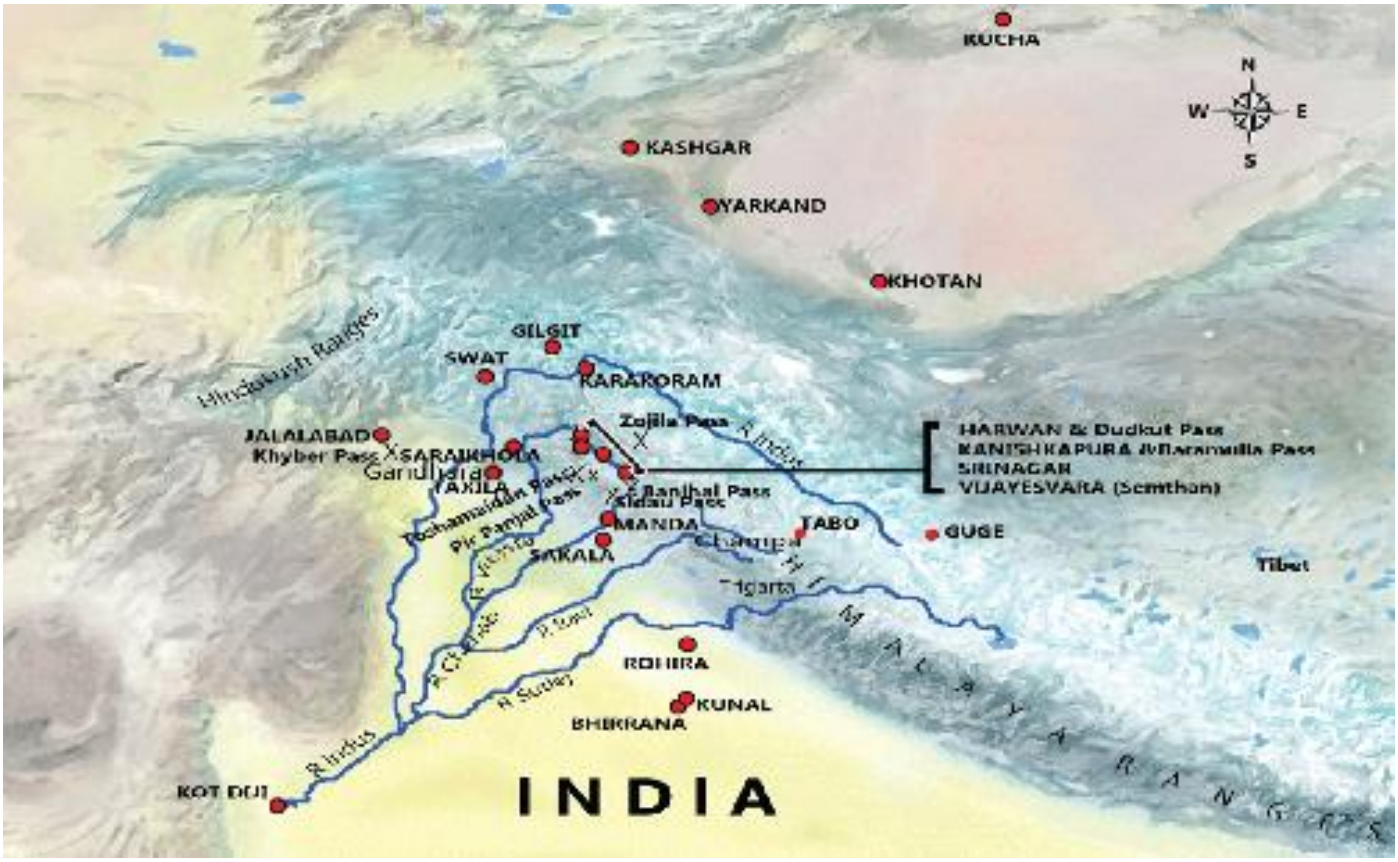
When the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*'s testimony on political cross-currents, social intercourse, and cultural transfers is put together, there emerges a fundamentally open and porous, swelling and ebbing character to the regional history of early Kashmir. Though this seems to result in a certain degree of social heterogeneity and unorthodoxy, there is no cultural ambivalence on display. Instead, *there seems a clear Indic predisposition to early Kashmir's self-understanding as articulated in the text*. Indeed, to state the obvious, this is clear from the choice of frame of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* itself, right from the manner in which the origins of Kashmir are presented in terms of Puranic cosmology, and the land is regarded as the embodiment of the goddess Pārvatī and the king as that of Śiva (see Chapter 3, section 'Kingdom of Piety'). How far was this picture of an Indic Kashmir, then, only a construct of Sanskrit literary culture and its Kashmiri brahmana affiliates?

Though this book has been primarily interested in retrieving the textual imaginary (warts and all), given that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is a historically referential text, it is instructive to glance at non-textual scenarios as well to answer the question just raised. This is less in the spirit of seeking corroboration for the text out of an empiricist valorization of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. Instead, the idea is to see what alternative imaginaries and landscapes can be harvested on the question of Kashmir's geo-cultural location. What the chapter attempts then is a creative recombination of textual and material practices. Moreover, knitting together a range of material evidence from early Kashmir with a unified interpretive question in mind is in itself worth doing since no such composite account of the evolution of material cultures in ancient Kashmir is available.

MATERIAL CULTURE

As B. D. Chattopadhyaya pointed out, 'culture … in a regional context assumes a recognizably distinct shape only through history, and only through different scales of interaction and integration.'[50] Regions are, therefore, perhaps best studied in the *longue durée*, which is precisely what, it can be argued, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* also does with Kashmir. Let us piece together the archaeology of early Kashmir in the same, diachronic long term. A spate of recent publications by archaeologists working in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has revealed that right from the Neolithic period there are elements indicating contemporaneity and similarity of patterns between Kashmiri Neolithic culture and the Harappan culture of Punjab and Haryana.[51] It was earlier maintained that Kashmiri Neolithic culture at Burzahom and Gufkral was unique in the subcontinent. These common elements include the following: one, a rich range of

chalcolithic or copper objects at late Neolithic Kanishkapura, Burzahom, and Gufkral in Kashmir. Two, a particular variety of crop, the emmer wheat mingled with barley, exclusive to Neolithic Kanishkapura heretofore, now found also at Early and Mature Harappan Kunal in Hissar, Haryana, and Rohira in Punjab. And three, building practices such as pit dwellings, thought so far to be uniquely diagnostic of Kashmiri Neolithic, now discovered also at Kunal as well as Bhirrana in Hissar (though there is some disagreement over whether these were indeed intended for dwelling or for storage in Kashmir itself). See Map 3, Connected histories II.



Map 3 Connected histories-II

Note: Map is not to scale; it is meant for broad, representational purposes only.

In addition, certain ceramic forms such as the dish-on-stand and perforated jar, carnelian beads, semi-precious stone blades, and even the horned deity motif on pottery also appear common to Kashmiri Neolithic and Harappan sites in the Indus plains such as Sarai Khola, Kot Diji, Rehman Dheri, and Gumla. The resemblances in material assemblage thus are not comprehensive but certainly add up to a great deal more than the solitary stone tool harvester reminiscent of the Chinese Neolithic found in Burzahom, on the basis of which a couple of scholars suggested a central Asian if not Chinese origin and character to the Kashmiri Neolithic, despite the complete absence of any other resemblance whatsoever![52] In contrast, the recent plethora of material

evidence outlined earlier for the Kashmir Neolithic and Harappan Punjab and Haryana taken together indicates not only long-standing contact and exchange between the two cultures from the 4th millennium BCE onwards,[53] but also gradually, by the end of the third millennium BCE, the emergence of the outlines of a common pattern of material culture across the valleys of the Vitastā, Chenab, and Ghaggar–Yamuna. A further look at the intervening settlement patterns of Jammu may even provide a clue as to how this could have come about: the co-existence of Early Harappan Manda in Jammu with Neolithic Malpur in Nawashehar district, Punjab, on either bank of the Chenab appears to provide connecting evidence of cultural interlinkage in the prehistoric period.[54]

From the Early Historic period onwards, this transregional integration at the level of material culture appears in irrefutable relief. The site of Semthan in Anantnag district, 44 kilometres south of Srinagar, in the vicinity of the major ancient Kashmiri city of Vijbror or Vijayeśvara (modern Bijbehara) which the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* mentions often, has provided extensive evidence of the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) culture from 500 BCE to 200 BCE.[55] As is well known, the celebrated NBPW culture is diagnostic of Second Urbanization or the rise and spread of cities and their associative traits such as punch-marked coinage, commerce, and state society first in the Gangetic Valley and central India and then all over the subcontinent from circa 6th century BCE onwards. The fact that this distinctive deluxe pottery together with silver and copper punch-marked coins,[56] including ones believed to belong to the Mauryan empire, signs of building construction, copper and iron objects, semi-precious stones, and terracotta beads all make an appearance in Period II Semthan is very significant, but not surprising. For one of the outstanding features of the Second Urbanization was the development of two great pan-Indian trade routes, the northern Uttarāpatha and the southern Dakṣiṇāpatha, that crisscrossed the subcontinent from its north-west to its south-east, and then from the south-east down south and south-west, deep into peninsular and coastal India. Many great cities of the Second Urbanization, such as Hastinapura, Mathura, Ayodhya, Banaras, Pataliputra, and Champa were located along the Uttarāpatha, as were the towns of central and south India such as Ujjayinī, Pratiṣṭhāna, and Kāncī on the Dakṣiṇāpatha. What is more, they were all thereby linked to one another and the world as well via this immense and flourishing network of trade and travel that connected with long-distance overland and maritime routes to West Asia and the Mediterranean on the one hand, and South East Asia on the other.

Two of these cities that played a prominent role in the Uttarāpatha were geographically and historically close to the Kashmir Valley. These were Takṣaśilā, modern Taxila, the capital of Gāndhāra, in the Peshawar plains to the west of the Valley and connected to it via the Baramulla Pass; and Śākala, modern Sialkot, capital of Madra in (Pakistani) Punjab on the banks of the Chenab, just west of Jammu and connected directly to the Vitastā valley through the Sidau or Budil pass, as also the

Toshamaidan and Pir Panjal Passes. Through Śākala and Takṣaśilā to Srinagar and onward through Ladakh on the one hand and Gilgit and Hunza on the other, the Uttarāpatha met the southern line of the Great Silk Route at Khotan, Yarkand, and Kashgar in the trans-Himalayas.

Furthermore, Takṣaśilā was a great centre of Sanskritic learning and culture from the beginning, as represented by the likes of the grammarian Pāṇini and the statecraft maestro Cāṇakya, and from its ascribed role in the *Mahābhārata* as the home of Śakunī, the instigator-in-chief of the *Mahābhārata* war. It is mentioned as a political ally of Kashmir in the *Harivaṁśa*.[57] Gāndhāra and Kashmir together, in turn, are named as the allies of Jarāsaṁdha, the mighty king of Magadha who fought on the part of the Kauravas.

Beyond these traditions, Takṣaśilā was also the provincial capital of the Mauryan Empire (326–180 BCE) both before and under Aśoka. Aśoka, as we noted earlier, is said to have ruled over Kashmir and founded its capital, apart from fatefully promoting Buddhism in the land (via Majjhantika, the missionary) from whence it was prodigiously taken by Kashmiris such as Kumārajīva to central Asia and China. The Imperial series punch-marked coins mentioned earlier tend to endorse this fact of Mauryan rule. Later, after the Indo-Bactrian experience, Gāndhāra seems to have been brought under Gupta suzerainty by Samudragupta in the early 4th century CE as suggested by the coins of the local ruler that mention that king's name. Śākala, after its Indo-Greek interlude associated with the famous king Menander or Milinda, was also subdued by Samudragupta, and seems to have played a role in transmitting artistic styles and traditions of Gupta classicism from the Indic heartland to Jammu and further to Kashmir, as seen in Akhnur (Ambaran), Harwan, and Semthan, respectively. More on this in the section on Art.

In other words, from the 6th century BCE onwards, commercially, politically, and culturally, there is strong material evidence to gauge not only the continuing and shaping relationship between Himalayan Kashmir and the non-Himalayan plains of Jammu and Punjab, but also, and probably via this relationship, the considerable integration or, to use the word popularized by the concept of connected histories, the entanglement of Kashmir in the material and ideological affairs of the rest of the subcontinent, or certainly a large part of it. Much later, of a piece with this picture is the other extraordinary finding of the 'śrī pratāpa' type coins of Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa, that 8th-century stellar Kashmiri king mentioned earlier, in excavations at Rajghat (Banaras), Sarnath, and Bhitare in Uttar Pradesh and at Monghyr and Nalanda in Bihar.[58] This may attest, numismatists suggest, to the reality of Lalitāditya's far-reaching military intrusion into the Indian plains.[59] And/or it could point to an intensive commercial presence of Kashmiris in the Gangetic valley at that time, and even to other affairs, such as education, occupation, and pilgrimage, that prompted such frequent traffic between the

two valleys. These comings and goings are described by Kalhaṇa, as we saw, and other Kashmiri poets such as Bilhaṇa and Kṣemendra.

SCRIPT

In the post-Mauryan period in Kashmir, that is, the period from the Indo-Greeks to the Kuṣāṇas, we get the earliest writing in the Valley, which leads us to the second cultural marker that I would like to draw attention to in this reconsideration of the cultural location of this Western Himalayan region. That marker is script. Earliest inscriptions found in the Western Himalayas as also the North-West are in the Kharoṣṭhī script, followed in circa 3rd–4th century CE by the mother of almost all Indic scripts, Brāhmī.

In Kashmir specifically, this refers to the legends struck on Indo-Greek, Śaka, Pehlava, and Kuṣāṇa coins that were in Kharoṣṭhī.[60] Earlier, though there are no Aśokan edicts in Kashmir, those in neighbouring Gāndhāra were certainly inscribed in Kharoṣṭhī along with Aramaic script of the Greek lands, the double use implying the local character and purpose of Kharoṣṭhī. Indeed, from the hundreds of famous graffiti in the far north at Chilas, Gilgit, and Hunza from the Śaka–Kuṣāṇa period to several sculpture inscriptions of the same time in Mathura, with Gāndhāra and Kashmir in between, Kharoṣṭhī emerges as a regional script par excellence up till the 3rd century CE.[61] Some believe that it seems to have been originated specifically for writing the north-western Prakrit known as Gāndhārī.[62]

This north-western writing system at some point begins to be seen together with Brāhmī in the Western Himalayas and beyond, for example, at Chilas and Shatial (the Karakoram highway), Mathura, Taxila, and Termez (the border of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan) in the first half of the 4th century CE.[63] Thereafter, everywhere, slowly but entirely, Kharoṣṭhī was surpassed by Gupta Brāhmī. A good example is from Kashmir in the Brāhmī legends on the coins of the Kidāra and Huna dynasties between the 4th and 6th centuries CE (this is also the time when the Kidāra or Gonandīya king Meghavāhana began to issue gold coins directly imitative of Gupta coinage, complete with seated Lakṣmī or Śiva and trident depictions; see section on Art).[64]

In the far north, too, it has been approximated that out of the 5,000-odd inscriptions in Hunza, Gilgit, Chilas, and so on, and the Karakoram Highway, some 80 per cent are in Brāhmī dating from the 3rd to 7th centuries CE, despite Kharoṣṭhī's early dominance.[65] Of these it is important to note that not all were inscribed by itinerant traders or travellers stopping by along the Karakoram Pass. There were many that seem to have been written by local and regional inhabitants, suggesting that this Indic script was firmly in use across this region. Further, it is interesting to note that the local Brāhmī used here shows affinities with the western style of Brāhmī found at Mathura from the 2nd to the 6th century CE.[66] Moreover, the names of the local kings, such as

the Paṭolaśāhī Navasurendrādityanandin, or the Darada Acalamangala, Jagaddala, and Maṇidhara, or Kīrtibhūṣaṇa of Chilas, are all distinctly Indic names.

Then, some time later, definitely by the 8th and 9th centuries, something of a new script emerged, again, everywhere in this northern–north-western region. This was Śāradā that emerged slowly but surely through certain proto-forms in the 7th century. Proto-Śāradā in turn evolved out of the local Brāhmī under the impress of Eastern Gupta Brāhmī (Allahabad style) with its straighter, narrower, and less ornate lines than the earlier Western Brāhmī (Mathura style).[67] One of the earliest stone inscriptions in Proto-Śāradā is the Sanskrit epigraph at Hatun in Gilgit circa 671 CE issued by an official of the local Paṭolaśāhī ruler Navasurendrādityanandin.[68] Others are found from Nirmand in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh, in Sonepat, Haryana, and in Khewra, Salt Range, Punjab (in Pakistan).

Though Śāradā is synonymous with Kashmir, full-fledged examples of it actually occur widely throughout this conjoint sphere that we have been trying to document and make visible through the evidence. Thus, the distribution of inscriptions in this distinctive script, though totalling only about a hundred, inscribed willy-nilly a culture region of its own. This region etched by the occurrence of writing in Śāradā spanned the following areas:

1. Gāndhāra, where twelve inscriptions from the 8th to the 15th centuries CE have been found, including the earliest at Hund (Attock district, Pakistan) from 744 CE. The earliest extant manuscript in Śāradā, a work on mathematics called the Bakhshali manuscript, 8th–10th century CE (?), is also from Gāndhāra.
2. North West Frontier Province or Upper Swat, Pakistan, yielded the 10th-century Dewai inscription of the Hindūśāhī kings Bhīmadeva and Jayapāla.
3. Kashmir, of course, where thirty-five Śāradā inscriptions have been documented so far, including legends on coins from the 9th century onwards (issued by the Utpala dynasty) and inscriptions at temples (Avantisvāmin) and writing on birch-bark manuscripts from the 14th century (the *Munimatamālā*). Classical Sanskrit *kāvya*s (*Abhijñānaśākuntala* and *Kathāsaritsāgara*) and two books (Ādi and Sabhā *parva*) of the *Mahābhārata* are also found in Śāradā from the 16th century. Śāradā continued to be used in public inscriptions for the longest time in Kashmir, right until the 18th century, albeit sparingly.[69] And unlike the stereotype that it was used only by and for Hindus, Śāradā has been found in Islamic and Buddhist contexts as well.[70]
4. Jammu has yielded six Śāradā inscriptions.
5. Ladakh has five Śāradā inscriptions.

6. Chamba in Himachal Pradesh has the most numerous at thirty-six from the 9th century onwards, including the famous Sarahan Praśasti and Brahmor and Sungal copper plates.
7. Kangra has three Śāradā inscriptions including the Baijnath praśasti.
8. Even as far as Delhi, the 13th-century Palam Stone slab inscription contains the use of Śāradā alongside the Nāgarī script.[71]

Table 4.1 Distribution of recovered Śāradā Inscriptions and Manuscripts. Following B. K. Kaul Deambi, 1982, *Corpus of Śāradā Inscriptions*.

Region	No. of Śāradā Inscriptions
Kashmir	35 (also 4 manuscripts)
Gāndhāra	12(also 1 manuscript)
Swat	02
Jammu	06
Ladakh	05
Chamba	36
Kangra	03
Delhi	01

Śāradā thus was another regional variant of Brāhmī special to the North-West and the Western Himalayas and can be described as the successor to Kharoṣṭhī in that sense. What is more, Śāradā enjoyed an extended life through its descendant Devaśeṣa which then spawned further sub-varieties in the late medieval period, giving rise to the modern Takari in Himachal and Gurmukhi in Punjab that continue to be in use today.

The point then is that whether it was Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī, or Śāradā, geo-cultural continuity and not isolation is apparent at the level of writing systems over the entire area from NWFP to Kangra, Chamba, and Punjab if not also the Delhi–Mathura region, with Kashmir, the home par excellence of Śāradā, as perhaps the pivot. It has been noted by George Grierson and other linguists that Śāradā is the only script to date—and not Nastaliq which nonetheless has been widely used from the 14th century onwards—that is suited to the phonetic peculiarities (the intricate vowel system) of the Kashmiri tongue, which are otherwise notoriously hard to capture.[72] So if script, like language, were to be the criterion for organizing regions, then in the early medieval period the nomenclature most appropriate for the new culture region straddling the Western Himalayas that I am proposing would be perhaps the Śāradā region!

LANGUAGE

A related question is that of language, our third marker, which has been partly answered in the earlier discussion. The earliest languages in use in Kashmir and across the region we are speaking of, though at slightly different time periods, were Prakrit

and Sanskrit, quintessentially languages of wider communication. Since this holds true for the rest of India too, it again underlines the connected histories of this area and the rest of the subcontinent. It also reaffirms Sanskrit's transregional and transethnic character and reach. This is seen in all the coins and inscriptions enumerated earlier from Gilgit–Baltistan, Kashmir, Jammu, Ladakh, and Chamba, as well as in the references to kings with epithets such as *mahārāja* and *śrī* and to their Sanskritic names, and in documents such as the Gilgit manuscript. It is really through Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan that, along with Buddhism, spread the provenance of these two languages, especially Sanskrit (described by Xuan Zang as 'the language of India'), in the trans-Himalayas, that is, in Khotan, Kucha, Turfan, and ancient Sogdia. There is abundant epigraphic and manuscript evidence for this in those lands from the 5th to the 10th century CE.[73]

However, what about Kashmiri, the vernacular? Though there is no early material evidence of it being written, references in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* suggest that it was definitely spoken in domestic or non-formal contexts from early on, though exactly when is impossible to say.[74] It is also found in mystic oral compositions called *vākh* of women saints such as Lal Ded (14th century) and in the *lol* or lyrics of longing sung by poetesses such as Habba Khatun (16th century). A full-fledged Kashmiri literary culture, however, does not seem to have formed, as discussed in Chapter 3.

However, I am concerned here with an academic question: the nature and origins of the Kashmiri tongue, again, for what light it may shed on where Kashmir stood culturally, since language is deemed an important indicator of cultural, if not ethnic, identity or orientation. Grierson's view from nearly a hundred years ago that Kashmiri along with Shina to its north belonged to the Dardic family of Piśāca languages, and not to the Indo-Aryan (IA) family to which the bulk of Indic languages belong, is regarded as defunct.[75] After the work of George Morgenstierne and Colin Masica, it is instead now accepted that the Dardic languages as a group share no linguistic features which distinguish them from IA languages and that the term essentially denotes 'a bundle of aberrant IA hill languages'.[76] 'Dardic languages' is therefore a geographic expression rather than a phylogenetic one.[77] What is more, it has been demonstrated that they can be traced to a form of speech that closely resembles Vedic or archaic Sanskrit. Incidentally, this would tie in with the recent suggestion of Andrew Ollett that Paiśācī, literally 'language of ghosts', may have referred to old languages or those of the past.[78] In other words, Kashmiri may originally have been but an old IA that preserved archaisms and other features such as consonant clusters and three sibilants. Its journey from Vedic Sanskrit to Kashmiri seems to have been mediated through Prakritic forms along the way.[79]

If this is correct, Kashmiri and Sanskrit would then be cognate languages, which would explain the obvious diglossia that existed in the Valley throughout the 1st millennium CE as well as the ease with which Kashmiri to date has been noted to shift to a lesser or greater Sanskritized register. In other words, linguistically as well we are looking at something of a horizontal continuum. The continuum extends, however, not only with Sanskrit but also, not surprisingly, between Kashmiri and Pahari, Kashmiri and Punjabi, and Kashmiri and Dogri, that is, with other IA dialects that fade in and out of the bordering areas of the Valley adjoining Himachal, Punjab, and Jammu, respectively.[80]

Why should none of this geo-cultural continuity or synchronicity actually surprise us? To remind readers, politics, commerce, learning, pilgrimage, tourism, exile and emigration, and patronage and diplomacy were just some of the motivations and contexts for the routine to and fro, give and take, that is documented by Kalhaṇa between Kashmir and areas near and far. Of these contexts our final cultural marker for the day, art, provides a highly visible index. It will be gone into in some detail.

ART

Art historians speak of three main phases of classical Kashmiri stone art and what is intriguing is that each displays extensive iconographic and stylistic traditions of the art of interior India, thousands of kilometres away[81] (see Map 2 Connected histories-I). This needs some detailing to understand and we follow John Siudmak's study because it is not only the latest but also the most comprehensive survey.[82] Before a Kashmiri school of art developed, stray, minor sculptures and fragments, including of *mithuna*s (amorous couple) and *yakṣa* (demigod of wealth)-like figures and one masturbating monkey (!), were recovered from Semthan dating to the 1st century CE. These are believed to be under the influence of the Hellenistic Gāndhāran school of art, though exact parallels in Gāndhāra itself are not to be seen.[83] It is worth noting that they occur alone, unaccompanied by any other evidence of Greek material culture in Kashmir, as Siudmak emphasizes. This is a major difference between Kashmir and Gāndhāra, which scholars tend to club together. In dress and ornamentation and aesthetic, on the other hand, these works are Indic and reminiscent of pre-Kuṣāṇa productions at Parkham, Mathura, and Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh).[84]

It is from the tiny sculptured sanctuary at Harwan (ancient Śaḍarhadvana) in the 4th century CE that the first signs of a mixed, eclectic style developing out of the confluence of Gāndhāran and now Gupta features appear. This in turn, archaeologist B. R. Mani has recently argued, was the result of this confluence having already been executed at ancient Ambaran (modern Akhnur) in Jammu circa 3rd century CE.[85] At Ambaran beautiful sculptured terracotta heads of Buddha and bodhisattvas as well as

lay men and women and other figurines and motifs attendant on a Buddhist stūpa have been excavated. These indicate the fusion of Gupta classicism with Gāndhāran elements such as stucco. It is from here, Mani argues, that this fusion progresses to Harwan and Ushkur or Huviṣkapura in the Valley, giving rise to a distinctive Kashmiri school of terracotta in the 4th century CE.

Thereafter, under King Meghavāhana in the early 5th century CE a Kashmiri school proper of stone sculpture, increasingly comprising brahmanical icons, formed. Here the transition from Gāndhāran to the Gupta as the main influence on Kashmiri art crystallizes, with the art from Mathura and Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh) as models.[86] This formative period of Kashmiri art is seen at Bijbehara (Vijbror/Vijayakṣetra) and Baramulla (Varāhmūla).

Before looking at the examples in stone, however, we should note the iconography of the base gold coins that this king issued. A recent discovery, some of the '18–20 gold coins' of Meghavāhana depict Śiva on the obverse, standing in contrapposto, with a crescent standard and a trident in one hand, and a lion sprawled at his feet. On the reverse is a nimbate Śrī/Lakṣmī seated *en face*, legs crossed on a lotus disc and holding a flowering lotus.[87] (See Image 2. Also see coins of Pravarasena and Tuñjina for this type: Images 3 and 4.) It should be noted that Śiva (*Oesho*) coins were issued in Kashmir by the earlier Kuṣāṇa kings as well, especially Kaniṣka and Vāsudeva.[88] The Meghavāhana coins carry Brāhmī legends naming the king ('śrī meghamah') and mentioning the dynasty ('kidara') and the formula for victory ('jaya'). Scholars point out that this coin type resembles those of Candragupta II (4th century CE) and Kumāragupta I (5th century CE), the two powerful Gupta kings of central India,[89] indicating thereby Kashmir's early adoption of Gupta art forms and standards. This is important because, I believe, it qualifies Siudmak's emphasis on the role of the Hunas, who succeeded Meghavāhana, in bringing Gupta artistic elements to Kashmir.[90] For if we must still be considering political dynasties as agents or harbingers of artistic change, a direct and unmediated influence of the Guptas rather than the Hunas is discernible in the Meghavāhana coins. For one thing, these attest Gupta political imperiality, not simply their artistic sensibility, as an emulatable standard or model in ancient Kashmir. Besides, we know that Gupta power had itself reached the Himalayan foothills in Punjab (Madra) and Jammu still earlier during Samudragupta's *digvijaya* of the mid-4th century, and Gupta cultural infusion is evident from then in terracotta in Ambaran, as we saw, and in stone in Simhapura or the Salt Range in Pakistani Punjab.[91]

Image 2 Gold coin of Meghavāhana, circa 5th century CE. Obverse: Śiva with trident. Reverse: Śrī/Lakṣmī. 'Śrī meghamah', 'kidara', and 'jaya' inscribed in Gupta Brāhmī.

Image courtesy of Todywalla Auctions.

Image 3 Gold coin of Pravarasena, circa 6th century CE. Obverse: Śiva with trident. Reverse: Śrī/Lakṣmī with lotus in both hands. 'Śrī pravarasena', 'kidara', and 'jaya' inscribed in Brāhmī.

Image courtesy of Todywalla Auctions.

Image 4 Gold coin of Tuñjina, circa 5th/7th century CE. Obverse: Śiva with trident offering oblations. Reverse: Śrī/Lakṣmī with lotus in both hands. 'Tuzina', 'kidara', and 'jaya' inscribed in Brāhmī.

Image courtesy of Todywalla Auctions.

Some good examples of the stone art of this period are the six-armed Kumāra Kārtikeya, son of Śiva and Pārvatī, standing frontally more than a metre high, complete with all his attributes and his *vāhana* (vehicle), the peacock. His physical traits are treated in a style reminiscent of a Gāndhāran Boddhisattva but his flying ribbons and corrugated hair strands suggest a Sassanian influence, and his large, annular ear ornaments tell a tiny Gupta tale.[92] The thigh-length *vanamālā* (garland) and the single-stranded short *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread) become standard features of Kashmiri iconography for centuries, varying only in their length.[93]

Other examples are a graceful standing contrapposto Lakṣmī and a Viṣṇu head. In these two images new facial features show up which are strongly evocative of Gupta Vaiṣṇava iconography at Cave 6, Udayagiri: shorter, rounder head, pointed chin with a dimple, almond-shaped eyes, full lips, a smiling expression, and an elaborate mittre crown or the *kirīta-mukuṭa*.[94] Again, *ekamukhaliṅga*s from this period, such as the one *in situ* in the Kotitirtha temple, recall the Udayagiri cave 4 *ekamukhaliṅga* in terms of its realistic rendering of anatomical details on the *liṅga*/shaft, facial features (rounded head with protruding chin, large, half-open almond eyes with heavy upper lids that slant upwards), and characteristic details of ornamentation. The Kotitirtha *liṅga* also sports loose strands of hair that flow out behind the ears in some other Gupta *liṅga*s, whereas it does not bear the *jaṭāmukuṭa* (crown of matted hair) of the Udayagiri *liṅga* but other Kashmiri Śaiva images picked up that feature as well.[95]

All of this strongly suggests in Kashmir an atelier or guild of artisans (*śilpī*s) who worked in central India, or were at any rate familiar with Gupta conventions generally and the specifics of the Udayagiri repertoire in particular. These features, borrowed or learnt from Gupta types, did not just characterize Kashmiri sculptural development in

this phase but became constant and identifying features of the school for most of its life in conjunction, of course, with some local specialities such as the distinctive use of grey-green chlorite stone. It is in this way that the art of the Himalayan provenance of Kashmir seems to have been inextricably shaped by non-Himalayan art.

Other examples include the most striking iconographic innovation of early Kashmiri art, the four-headed Maheśvara as Bhūteśvara, 1.54 metres high, lion-skinned *dhotī* tightly wrapped around an ithyphallic body, with Umā and Nandī, found among the ruins of a Śiva temple at Fattegarh, near Uri, some way down from Baramulla. The stock pan-Indian iconographic formula, the *trimūrti* or triad, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa, shows up at least three times from the Valley in the 6th century in different materials (grey chlorite, also a speckled white chlorite). Finally, two fragmentary standing Gaṇeśas in grey chlorite are also found; their ithyphallic treatment may again come from Udayagiri cave 6. Please note that the formative phase of Kashmiri sculpture was closely paralleled in Kashmir Smast area in Swat, and in Sahri Bahlol and Taxila in Gāndhāra, on the one hand, and Simhapura in Pakistan Punjab, on the other.

Kashmiri art from the 7th century is identified with Pandrethan (Purāṇādhiṣṭhāna), 3.5 kilometres south-east of Srinagar, where hundreds of images were recovered over kilometres of scatter. The new features of this phase invoke the post-Gupta idiom this time of Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh) and Nalanda (Bihar). These new features included ‘bold modeling and ornamentation, bluish-grey limestone with green and red inclusions excavated from nearby quarries’, a general standardized format for brahmanical and Buddhist images alike which involved a new way of wrapping the *dhotī*, rearranging of the *vanamālā* which now falls long and low below the knees, a double-stranded *yajñopavīta* also extending now much lower to the groin, and the appearance of the characteristic window effect—hair divided laterally into two compartments—which is known in such numbers only from Kashmir or Sarnath and Nalanda.[96] The female form similarly acquires more closely features of what may be called the classical Indian type —high and narrow waist, large firm breasts, and wide hips.

Good examples of this phase are the Padmapāni of Stūpa A, standing 1.43 metres tall; a four-armed Śaivite *dvārapāla* (gate guardian); a standing Maheśvara; and, for the first time, a three-headed Vaikuṇṭha Viṣṇu with the heads of a boar and a lion attached on either side, the uniquely Kashmiri Vaiṣṇava representation. There are also a number of large *mātṛkā*s (mother goddesses), such as Cāmuṇḍā (1.35 metres), Indrāṇī (1.66 metres), and Vaiṣṇavī, some in a dancing pose, which also seems a Kashmiri innovation.

The seminal impress of the Sarnath school is evidenced again and more deeply in the 8th-century Classical style of Kashmiri art associated with the Kārkoṭa capital of Parihāsapura (Paraspor, 20 kilometres from Srinagar) and continuing at Pandrethan. It sustained for another two centuries. Siudmak calls it ‘an extraordinary conglomerate

post-Gupta style' directly related to the late and post-Gupta art of Sarnath and Nalanda under the Pālas.[97] This coincided with the reign of the illustrious Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa who certifiably conquered Kanauj, Sarnath, and Nalanda, and is also known to have imported colossal pieces of Buddhist art, the *bṛhad buddha*s in bronze, from Magadha.[98] This may well explain the singular links that seem to stretch between Kashmir and post-Gupta Bihar in the 8th and 9th centuries. Herman Goetz has also speculated that Lalitāditya hired artists from Kanauj, Sarnath, and Bengal.[99] However, the role of Buddhist monks and patrons, not to mention traders as lay devotees, should also be recognized given that both Kashmir and Sarnath–Nalanda were great Buddhist centres, something else that may account for their artistic affinity. The outstanding Kashmiri feature of sculptures thus influenced is large-scale statuary and the distinctive grey chlorite with green inclusions used, not the Gāndhāran green schist nor the Mathuran red sandstone.[100]

In the increasingly Buddhistic corpus now, a number of other features in direct imitation of Sarnath make an appearance in the Valley, such as the use of buff stone, a plain, not pleated robe for the Buddha, and a new mode of the standing Buddha holding the robe in raised left hand at shoulder level—a sign par excellence of the Classical style—all of which are seen at Soura, Sonibagh, and Badgam. Still on the Bihar connection, the largest and best-known sculptural corpus of Kashmir from the late 7th century onwards, preserved in the monasteries of Tibet that commissioned these, are very much Buddhist bronzes. Furthermore, the technique employed in moulding these was the same as that practised throughout ancient India, namely *cire perdue*.[101]

Among the Brahmanical images, a number of the complete four-headed Vaikuṇṭha Viṣṇus are found now, as are images of Brahmā in bronze, as also Sūrya in bronze and stone (at Martand), one of Harihara, and a spectacular eighteen-armed Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī, in pristine green chlorite once more, all 68.6 centimetres of it, from Tengapura and Khonamuh, and at least a couple of other, eight- and six-armed Durgās in bronze. See Images 5–9.

Image 5 Ekamukhaliṅga Śiva, circa 6th century CE.

Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Cultural Commons.

Image 6 Vaikuṇṭha Viṣṇu, circa 8th century CE.

Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Cultural Commons.

Image 7 Śiva and Pārvatī with Kārtikeya and Gaṇeśa, circa 9th century CE.

Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Cultural Commons.

Image 8 Many-armed Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī in green chlorite from Tengpura, circa 9th century CE.

Image courtesy of Vinay Kumar Gupta.

Image 9 Tibetan Buddha in bhūmisparśamudrā, circa 11th century CE.

Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Cultural Commons.

At every stage of its development then, early Kashmiri sculpture displayed what Siudmak rightly calls *a constant synchronicity with Northern Indian developments*,[102] though inclusive of local innovations. So much so that one is compelled to ask with Kashmir as a case study—how Himalayan was Himalayan Art when its cultural roots were sourced from the surrounding plains as well as the interiors of India? This is important because, without questioning the distinctive appearance of 'hill art', its separation from Indic art that some scholars maintain would need to be revisited.[103]

Before we stop to evaluate the findings as a whole of this study of cultural markers, it should be noted that we have consciously excluded two major markers (among possibly others), namely literature and religion, for studying the links between Kashmir and the Indic subcontinent. A word about them is due here. The reason for their exclusion is that these two fields have been studied extensively, some would say obsessively, by modern scholars, and the results of all this work are well known and clearly establish connected histories already. The work has underlined that Kashmir overwhelmingly shared and indeed spearheaded movements in the worlds of both Sanskrit literature and assorted Indian faiths and their philosophies.

To tell the literary story briefly and somewhat in caricature form, a string of Kashmiri master-rhetoricians, from Vāmana in the 7th century, followed by Rudraṭa, Udbhaṭa, Mammaṭa, Ruyyaka, Bhaṭṭa Tauta, to Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta in the 10th and 11th centuries CE, not only propounded some of the most highly sophisticated philosophico-linguistic theories (for example, *dhvani*) the world has known, but also virtually monopolized and redefined *alaṁkāraśāstra* (science of poetics) and *kāvya* composition for the rest of the Sanskrit academy. We know that their works, together with those of early medieval Kashmiri poets such as Mankha, Kṣemendra, and Bilhaṇa, circulated widely, and were studied as learned models to be imitated by Sanskrit and vernacular scholars as far south as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra, something that has recently been colourfully described as saffron in the rasam![104] This perfectly illustrates Pollock's theory of the Sanskrit cosmopolis stretching all across India and beyond, and shaping the process of vernacularization as well. But it was Kashmir alone, venerated as *Śārādādeśa* or the land of the goddess of learning, that was given pride of place in the imagination and practice of vernacular pundits across the length of India. This was contemporary acknowledgement of the

brilliance of the scholarship that emerged from there but it is also indicative of the degree to which Kashmir was an indispensable part of the Indic ecumene.

It is almost the same stellar story in the field of religion: Not only are the great Buddhist philosophers Nāgārjuna (1st century CE) from central India and Vasugupta/bandhu (4th century CE) suspected to have lived or preached in Kashmir at some point,[105] but the fourth Buddhist council that recorded and reinterpreted the Buddhist canon is also believed to have been organized by the Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka in Kashmir in the 3rd century CE. That is not all: it is Kashmiris such as Kumārajīva (4th century) and Arhat Vairocana who are believed to be responsible for disseminating early Buddhism, especially of the Sarvastivāda school and later the Mādhyamika school, to Kucha, Turfan, Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, and other centres in China, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (including ancient Sogdia).[106] Much later, Rinchen Tzangpo, the reviver of Tibetan Buddhism in the 11th century CE, studied in Kashmir and acknowledged his debt to its scholarship; he also called for Kashmiri artisans and architects to build the monasteries in Tibet and in Spiti and Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh).[107] See Map 3 Connected histories II.

Apart from Buddhism, it is Śaiva mystic monism that is best associated with early Kashmir. Known as Trikā, or the philosophy of three, its early exponents were Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta (same as the literary theorist), 8th–10th century CE. It is said to represent the most subtle integration of tantra with Śiva worship and came to inform Śaivism in parts of south India. But it is worth noting that Śiva worship was evidently rooted in the Valley well before these masters, as reflected, for example, in the Kuṣāṇa coins and those of Meghavāhana and later Kashmiri kings, and of course in the Śaiva temples constructed. But, equally, there is art or epigraphic evidence of it in Swat and in Kashmir Smast to the north west of Kashmir (Dadam Das and Thor North site), in Gilgit–Baltistan (Chilas, Hodar, Thalpan I) to the immediate north, in Taxila to the west, and still further west in Afghanistan (Dilberzim).[108] Indeed, the study of religions other than Buddhism in the entire North–North-West in the early period stands relatively neglected.

The survey of cultural markers in this chapter, limited no doubt in its scope and coverage, is nonetheless indicative of the need for reappraising various assumptions both about the cultural location of early Kashmir and about the Western Himalayas as a somehow self-contained, isolate-ecumene, responsive to only its mountain-bound provenance. Charting the interconnections and synchronicities across Gāndhāra, Gilgit–Baltistan, Ladakh, Kashmir, Jammu, Punjab, Haryana, Chamba, and Kangra may appear to overlook local differences, which is certainly not the aim. However, more to the point, it allows one to discern the contours of a loose regional configuration, not noticed before, that straddled the Himalayan–non-Himalayan divide. These early

connected histories, of which this chapter provides but a hint and a glimpse, speak to the expansive and ductile nature of culture, and carry within them tales of dynamic movements and flows across millennia—as much of ideas as of icons, as much of people as of products. This is the 'big history' that is waiting to be written alongside regional histories of early India, for it helps understand the historical networks within which regions such as Kashmir may have been constituted.

From the survey, belying descriptors such as remote and isolated, early Kashmir emerges to be in the thick of things, both within the immediate regional context and vis-à-vis the supra-region—a periphery in no sense whatsoever. Nor does it appear as a cultural crossroads; the impress of the Indic cultural regime on the landscape is undeniable, and resonates with the iconic Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang's experience of travels through these lands back in the 7th century CE, a fitting testimony with which to wrap up this investigation. Standing in the neighbourhood of Langham near modern Jalalabad (ancient Nagarahāra), which is west of even the Khyber Pass in the Hindukush range and therefore entirely west of Gāndhāra and Kashmir, Xuan Zang felt he stood at the gateway to a country called Indu. That this referred to India and not just the Indus plains is evident from the dimensions of 90,000 li Zang attributed to this country of 70 different kingdoms bounded by 'the snowy mountains in the north and the sea on three sides'—the traditional manner in which the Indian subcontinent has always been described.[109] What this suggests is that it was the Hindukush that performed the boundary of the Indic culture area, and not the Indus river. And the areas east of the Hindukush, centred on Kashmir, served as the font of a wide diffusion of Indic knowledge and culture to Central Asia and beyond where it was recognized as that.

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[1] For example, Slaje writes: 'Until the end of the 19th century Kashmir was secluded from the plains of India to a degree now almost inconceivable … Kashmir was almost hermetically sealed off for considerably more than 1000 years …'('Kashmir Minimundus: India's Sacred Geography en miniature', in *Highland Philology*, ed. Roland Steiner [Universitat-verlag Halle-Wittenberg, 2012], pp. 10–11). See similar but less extreme statements in Susan Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India: Hindu, Buddhist, Jain* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985), p. 353; Romila Thapar, 'Kalhana', in *Historians of Medieval India*, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan), pp. 60–1.

[2] Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, p. 353. Slaje echoes this. Stein also used the words 'isolation' and 'seclusion' (*The River of Kings*, vol. 1, pp. 30, 132). Thapar also thinks isolation led to a 'stronger sense of nationalism' and hence history writing, wherein she is echoing Basham, 'The Kashmir Chronicle', in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C. H. Philips (London: Oxford University Press), p. 57.

[3] Mahesh Sharma, 'Purāṇic Texts from Kashmir: Vitastā and River Ceremonials in the *Nīlamata Purāṇa*', *South Asia Research* 28, no. 2 (2008): 123–45.

[4] Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001).

[5] Christopher Minkowski, 'The Pundit as Public Intellectual: The Controversy over Virodha or Inconsistency in the Astronomical Sciences', in *The Pundit: Traditional Sanskrit Scholarship in India*, ed. Axel Michaels (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), p. 94.

[6] Nath herself admits this nature of the texts. For a pithy critique of hierarchical and instrumentalist interpretations of *Purāṇas*, see David Shulman, Book Review, *Studies in History* 19, no. 2 (2003): 279–82.

[7] Arjun Appadurai sounds this note of caution regarding the anthropologist's, and one must add the historian's, obsession with hierarchy when studying India ('Theory in Anthropology: Centre and Periphery', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 [1986]: 356–60).

[8] It has recently been suggested that Kashmir be investigated as a borderland because of its location as a part of three different empires (the Afghan, the Sikh, and the British/Dogra) in the early modern period (C. Zutshi, 'Rethinking Kashmir's History from a Borderlands Perspective', *History Compass* 8/7 [2010]: 594–608). Borderlands is the emerging concept of a place in-between and in-flux, where cultures were shaped by constant exchange and negotiation. It is possible, however, that a political criterion like a shifting claim on Kashmir by different kingdoms might miss out on the full potential of the concept for explaining hybridity of cultures.

[9] For example, Laxman S. Thakur, *Buddhism in the Western Himalayas: A Study of the Tabo Monastery* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Peter van Ham, *Indian Tibet, Tibetan India: The Cultural Legacy of the Western Himalayas* (Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2015). See also the website www.himalayanart.org with its heavily, if not exclusively, Buddhist and Tibetan slant.

[10] D. K. Chakrabarti, *India: An Archaeological History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 26–9; Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, p. 353; Suchandra Ghosh, 'Blurring the Boundaries: Movement and Migration at the Cross Roads of Asia (c. 5th Century BCE–c. 3rd Century CE)', *Journal of Ancient Indian History* XXVI (2011): 1. Also by Ghosh, 'Hellenism in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands', in *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, eds Gautam Sengupta and Sharmi Chakraborty (Delhi: Pragati Publications, 2008), pp. 69–79.

[11] For example, even Kashmir's history writing is attributed by Basham ('The Kashmir Chronicle', p. 57) and Thapar ('Kalhaṇa', p. 61) to her contact with central and west Asian 'peoples possessing a stronger sense of history than did India'. Recently, Jesse Knutson takes this persistent fallacy to an extreme, saying 'It is obvious the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was … modeled on the Shahnama [of Firdausi]' ('Poetic Justice: On Kalhana's Historical Aesthetics', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 2: 283).

[12] These central Asian dynasties themselves came to be heavily Indicized as reflected in the cultural choices they made, from faiths and personal names they adopted to the language and literature they patronized. This is mirrored in Kalhaṇa calling the Kuṣāṇas, 'Turks who yet built *tīrthas*' (*RT* I.170). For recent discussions, see C. Rapin, 'Hinduism in the Indo-Greek Area. Notes on Some Indian Finds from Bactria and Two Temples in Taxila', in *In The Land of the Gryphons: Papers on Central Asian Archaeology in Antiquity*, ed. Antonio Invernizzi (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1995), pp. 275–92; and Daniel Michon, *Archaeology and Religion in Early North west India: History, Theory, Practice* (Delhi: Routledge, 2015).

[13] Kalhaṇa places Mihirakula much earlier than epigraphic and numismatic evidence from central India attests. Therefore, in his narration, Mihirakula erroneously long precedes Toramāṇa. See *RT* I.289 and III.102. See also Richard Salomon, 'New Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Aulikaras of Mandasaur', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 32 (1989): 1–39.

[14] *RT* I.312–17.

[15] In reality, it is the name Srinagar that stuck but the location of the modern-day Srinagar, the capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, is at the site of Pravarapura that was founded by King Pravarasena circa 6th century CE.

[16] *RT* I.117, 297–300; III.27–30, 77.

[17] *RT* III.324–31; V.136.

[18] *RT* IV.259.

[19] *RT* IV.263.

[20] *RT* IV.126.

[21] Inden, 'Imperial Purāṇas: Kashmir as a Vaiṣṇava Centre of the World' in Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, Daud Ali, *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 87. Emphasis is mine.

[22] The *Raghuvaṁśam digvijaya* is itself suspected to have been based on the military expeditions of the Gupta king Samudragupta circa 4th century CE.

[23] Michael Meister is sceptical of the degree of Lalitāditya's success against Kanyākubja and its ruler Yaśovarman (Michael Meister, 'Mountain Temples and Temple-Mountains: Masrur', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, 1: 28–9).

[24] Lalitāditya is described as *pratāpāditya* (the bright heat of the sun) in *RT* IV.134.

[25] Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Coins* (Delhi: Dilpreet Publishers, 2013), p. 38. The identification of these coins, numbering several thousands, with Lalitāditya goes back to Alexander Cunningham, *Coins of Medieval India*: *From the Seventh Century down to the Mohammedan Conquests* (London, 1894), p. 44. See also P. Dayal, 'Treasure Trove Find of 16,448 Electron Coins in Banda district', *Numismatic Supplement* XLI (1928) and V. S. Agrawala, 'The Rajghat Hoards of Sri Pratapa Coins', *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* X, pt. I (1948): 32. Recently, John Deyell and Joe Cribb have separately suggested—untenably, to my mind—that these coins were not Lalitāditya's or even Kashmiri issues but those of King Harṣa of Sthaniśvara/Kanauj (Joe Cribb, 'Early Medieval Kashmir Coinage: A New Hoard and an Anomaly', *Numismatic Digest* 40 [2016]: 110).

[26] *RT* IV.337.

[27] *RT* II.5; III.125, 242.

[28] *RT* I.82. *NP* verses 4–5, 10.

[29] Kumkum Roy, 'The Making of a Manḍala: The Fuzzy Frontiers of Kalhana's Kashmir', in *Negotiating India's Past: Essays in Memory of Parthasarthi Gupta*, eds B. Pati, B. P. Sahu, and T. K. Venkatasubramaniam (Delhi: Tulika Books), pp. 52–66.

[30] Michael Witzel goes so far as to extrapolate the following from this episode: 'The NP seeks to establish a relation with the *Mahābhārata* war *while keeping the country apart from India proper*. Right from the beginning of Kashmiri history, this is a clear sign of the *Kashmiris' preoccupation with … their separate existence from the rest of the subcontinent*, pursued through most of history…' [emphasis added] (The Kashmiri Pandits: Their Early History', in *The Valley of Kashmir: The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture?* ed. Aparna Rao [Delhi: Manohar, 2008], p. 48). In the face of the evidence of Kashmir's centrality to Indic civilization that this chapter collates, this is surely an over-reading of the Puranic episode, if not a retrojection of separatist causes of the present to the hoary past.

[31] *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa*, II.34.20, translated by A. Purushothaman and A. Harindranath, based on the Chitrashala Press edition 1936, edited by Pandit Ramachandrashastri Kinjawadekar. Source: http://mahabharata-resources.org/harivamsa/harivamsa-cs-index.html.

[32] *RT* II.145–51; III.3–15.

[33] *RT* IV.322–33.

[34] *RT* VIII.224–8.

[35] *RT* VIII.234.

[36] *RT* VIII.702–842.

[37] *RT* VIII.842–8.

[38] *RT* III.102–5; VI.176; VII.152; VIII.204–5.

[39] *RT* IV.246.

40 *RT* VII.189, 190–3, 204.

41 *RT* VII.675, 926, 1207; VIII.323.

42 *RT* IV.11–12, 594; VI.318; VII.520; VIII.493.

43 *RT* IV.244.

44 For brahmanas being settled or provided for in Kashmir, see *RT* I.307–12 (from Gāndhāra), I.341–3, VI.300, VI.300 (from Saurāṣṭra and Lāṭa), VIII.2444 (from the Indus region and Drāviḍa brahmanas). For Buddhists being settled or catered to, see *RT* III.3–15 (by Meghavāhana), and *RT* IV.244 (by Lalitāditya). Several kings and queens including Yaśaskara (*RT* VI.87), Amṛtaprabhā (*RT* III.9), Gopāditya (*RT* I.343), and Jayasiṁha (VIII.2444) built monasteries for students and pilgrims who came from 'abroad' (*digantarāt*) or 'from the plains' (*deśyabhikṣūṇām*).

45 *RT* III.297; IV.414–20; VII.646, 1007–8; VIII.13. Interestingly, Mridu Rai believes that the practices of the Dogra kings of Jammu and Kashmir in the 19th century, such as pilgrimage to Haridwar and Banaras and promotion of Sanskrit learning, 'reimagined Kashmir's political landscape as Hindu' ('"To Tear the Mask Off the Face of the Past": Archaeology and Political Protest in Jammu and Kashmir', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46, no. 3: 401–26, 412). Given the long and ancient history of these royal practices in Kashmir, it can be asked whether their adoption by the Dogras after six centuries of an Islamic rule hiatus was a reimagining or a restoration. To suggest the former is to naturalize Kashmir as Islamic, which is certainly true of the 19th century but hardly of Kashmiri history in the *longue durée*. Zutshi seems to adopt the same perspective on Islam and Hinduism in Kashmir when she explains 'the salience of religion [Islam] to the discourse on identity' as 'a direct result of the overtly Hindu nature of the Dogra state's apparatus of legitimacy' (Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity and the Making of Kashmir* [Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003], p. 13). This approach does not seem to address the implications of centuries of Islamization of the Valley from the 14th century onwards.

46 *RT* VI.254; VII.1008.

47 *RT* III.480.

48 *RT* IV.322–32; Qeyamuddin Ahmad (ed.), *India by Al-Beruni* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1983), p. 53.

49 See Eck, *India*. Slaje argues that it is because the hoary sacred sites of Hinduism were so far away from Kashmir that Kashmiris created a microcosm of that world via a network of local *tīrtha*s (see Slaje, 'Kashmir Minimundus: India's Sacred Geography en Miniature', p. 12). As a matter of fact, we get any number of references in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* to Kashmiris routinely making journeys to sites such as Banaras, Prayaga, and Gaya in addition to their local pilgrimage sites.

50 B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Geographical Perspectives, Culture Change and Linkages: Some Reflections on Early Punjab', in *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues*, ed. B. D. Chattopadhyaya (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 49. For more on linkages and interactions in region formation, see Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, *The Changing Gaze: Regions and the Constructions of Early India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

51 See B. R Mani, 'Excavations at Kanispur, 1998–99', *Pragdhara* 10 (1999–2000): 1–32; Mani, 'Kashmir Neolithic and Early Harappan: A Linkage', *Pragdhara* 18 (2008): 229–47; Mani, 'Further Evidence on Kashmir Neolithic in the Light of Recent Excavations at Kanishkapura', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Archaeology* 1, no. 1 (2004): 137–43.

52 S. L. Shali, 'Neolithic Culture in Kashmir with special reference to Central Asia,' in *Central Asia and Western Himalaya: A Forgotten Link*, ed. G. M. Buth (Srinagar, 1986), pp. 19–26. Also, G. M. Buth, I. A. Navchoo, N. Asti, 'Central Asia and Kashmir: An Appraisal of Post [*sic*] and Present Links', *Journal d'agriculture Traditionnelle et de Botanique Appliquee* 34 (1987): 57–64. Buth and colleagues also suggested that common flora such as peach was evidence of Chinese culture in Kashmir, forgetting the more plausible role of a shared temperate clime. Moreover, actual human migration is not always required for broadcasting of plant species across favourable ecologies.

53 Mani, 'Kashmir Neolithic and Early Harappan', p. 229

54 Mani, 'Further Evidence on Kashmiri Neolithic', p. 139.

[55] Gaur, 'Semthan Excavation', pp. 327–37. See also *Indian Archaeology: A Report*, 1980–1.

[56] Ahmad, *Kashmir Coins*, p. 13.

[57] *Harivaṁśa* II.34.20.

[58] Ahmad, *Kashmir Coins*, p. 38.

[59] Ahmad, *Kashmir Coins*, p. 5.

[60] Ahmad, *Kashmir Coins*, pp. 16–30.

[61] Indeed, some scholars provocatively point to the structural similarities of Kharoṣṭhī with Brāhmī, both being syllabic scripts, even though others regard Kharoṣṭhī as having Semitic, not Indic, origin, despite Semitic scripts such as Aramaic being consonant scripts (*Blackwell Encyclopaedia Online,* 1999).

[62] www.indicscripts.com

[63] Jason Neelis, 'Review of Die Felsbildstation Shatial', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 11 (2000): 220.

[64] John Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir and Its Influences* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2013), p. 14.

[65] D. Bandini-Konig cited by Jason Neelis, 'Hunza-Haldeikish Revisited: Epigraphical Evidence for Trans-regional History', in *Karakoram in Transition: Culture, Development and Ecology in the Hunza Valley*, ed. Herman Kreutzmann (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 167, fn 15.

[66] Neelis, 'Hunza-Haldeikish Revisited', pp. 164, 167.

[67] Lore Sander, 'Remarks on the Formal Brahmi of Gilgit, Bamiyan and Khotan', in *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan: Reports and Studies,* vol. I, *Rock Inscriptions in the Indus Valley*, ed. Karl Jettmar (Mainz: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 1989), p. 110.

[68] Earlier calligraphic Ornate Brahmi of Gilgit was also observed in use in Bamiyan and Khotan, attesting to the outreach of this cultural marker. See Sander, 'Remarks'.

[69] B. K. Kaul Deambi, *Corpus of Śāradā Inscriptions of Kashmir with Special Reference to Origin and Development of Śāradā Script* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1982), p. 132.

[70] For example, see Deambi, *Corpus of Śāradā Inscriptions*, pp. 97–154.

[71] These figures are gleaned from Deambi, *Corpus of Śāradā Inscriptions.* Regrettably, there is no more recent survey of Śāradā inscriptions, to the best of my knowledge.

[72] George A. Grierson, *Essays on Kachmiri Grammar* (London: Luzac and Co.; Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1899), pp. 2–3.

[73] For details, see Sander, 'Remarks on the Formal Brahmi', pp. 114–15 and K. Warikoo, 'Karakoram Himalayas and Central Asia: The Buddhist Connection', in *The Other Kashmir: Society, Culture and Politics in the Karakoram Himalayas*, ed. K. Warikoo (Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014), pp. 19–22.

[74] One instance of an exclamation in Kashmiri is quoted in the *RT* V.398.

[75] See Kachru, 'The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris: Kashmiri Literary Culture and Language', in *The Valley of Kashmir*: *The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture*, ed. Aparna Rao (Delhi: Manohar, 2008), p. 314.

[76] George Morgenstierne, 'Dardic and Kafir Languages', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. 2, Fasc. 25 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), pp. 138–9. See Colin P. Masica, *The Indo-Aryan Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See Kachru, 'The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris', p. 318 for the wide acceptance of this understanding among scholars of the region. See also Roland J. L. Breton, *Atlas of the Languages and Ethnic Communities of South Asia*, 2nd edition (Delhi: SAGE, 1999), p. 59.

[77] Kachru, 'The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris', p. 317.

[78] Andrew Ollett, 'Ghosts from the Past: India's Undead Languages', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51, no. 4 (2014): 405–56.

[79] See S. K. Toshkhani, 'Some Important Aspects of Kashmiri as a Language', in *The Literary Heritage of Kashmir*, ed. K. L. Kalla (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985), pp. 18–23.

[80] Kachru, 'The Dying Linguistic Heritage of the Kashmiris', pp. 308–9.

[81] Some, like Huntington, argue for a considerable West Asian Hellenistic element and, therefore, a mixed character to Kashmiri art. *The Art of Ancient India*, pp. 353–85. She also acknowledges, however, that 'Kashmiri art is mainly dependent on Indic idioms' (p. 353).

[82] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir.*

[83] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 46.

[84] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, pp. 32, 48. Some examples of parallels are the girdle and the pleats in the *paridhāna* (garment) falling between the legs.

[85] B. R. Mani, 'Dating of Akhnur Terracottas in the Light of Recent Excavations at Ambaran', *Marg* 54, no.1 (2002): 42–7.

[86] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 24.

[87] Given that the context of the coins is Śaiva and that the goddess on some of the other Meghavāhana coins in the same hoard is seated on a lion, Joe Cribb has debated whether the goddess should be identified as the Vaiṣṇava Lakṣmī or as the Śaiva Durgā. He concludes by calling her 'a Śaivite version of Śrī'. Cribb, 'Early Medieval Kashmir Coinage', p. 101.

[88] See Ahmad, *Kashmir Coins*, pp. viii–xiii.

[89] Cribb, 'Early Medieval Kashmir Coinage', p. 100.

[90] Confounding the picture somewhat is Cribb placing the 'śrī meghamah' type coins in the 6th–7th centuries CE. Cribb, 'Early Medieval Kashmir Coinage', p. 110.

[91] B. R. Mani, 'Dating of Akhnur Terracottas'. Siudmak in *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir* (p. 137) refers to the temple remains of Murti in Salt Range, Pakistan, where a 'pure Gupta' style is in evidence.

[92] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 80.

[93] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 81.

[94] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, pp. 80–111.

[95] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, pp. 138–41.

[96] Ready parallels are the standing Maitreya at Chaukhandi Stūpa in Sarnath or the Sidhaikavi form of Maitreya from the same site, and the Mahāvihāra Avalokiteśvara from Nalanda from the 7th century. For details of the new features or changes, see Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, pp. 198–212.

[97] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 211.

[98] See sections on Text and Material Culture in this chapter.

[99] Hermann Goetz, *Studies in the History and Art of Kashmir and the Indian Himalaya* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969).

[100] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 71.

[101] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 260. *Cire perdue* is a method of bronze casting using wax to produce a figurine with a hollow core.

[102] Siudmak, *The Hindu–Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir*, p. 208.

[103] For example, Balthasar Bickle and Martin Gainszle, *Himalayan Space: Cultural Horizons and Practices* (Zurich: Robert Hurlimann, 1999), p. 19.

[104] Whitney Cox, 'Saffron in the Rasam', in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, eds Y. Bronner, W. Cox, and L. McCrea (Delhi: Primus Books, 2016 [first pub. 2011, Ann Arbor]), pp. 177–201. Tenth-century Kashmiri texts being studied in south India in the 15th century has also been acknowledged by Pollock, 'Sanskrit Literary Culture', p. 112.

[105] Kalhaṇa himself refers to Nāgārjuna having lived in Śaḍarhadvana or Harwan (*RT* I.173).

[106] For a good summary, see P. N. K. Bamzai (ed.), *Kashmir and Central Asia* (New Delhi, Light and Life Publishers, 1981). Also Warikoo, 'Karakoram Himalayas and Central Asia', pp. 13–26.

[107] For more details, see T. N. Dhar, *Saints and Sages of Kashmir* (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2004).

[108] Muhammad Arif, 'Rock Art of Gilgit–Baltistan', in *The Other Kashmir: Society, Culture and Politics in the Karakoram Himalayas*, ed. K. Warikoo (Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014), pp. 8–10.

[109] Sally Hovey Wriggins, *The Silk Road Journey with Xuan Zang* (USA: Westview Press, 2003), p. 56.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

If culture is shared meanings and values, representation, especially textual, is one of the central practices that produces culture. Representation is defined as the production of meaning through language, that is, through commonly construed symbols of signification. It is in this sense that I identify Sanskrit *kāvya*, a highly cognitive and discursive form of language use, as a medium of cultural production, or meaning-making in early India. Specifically in early Kashmir, the *kāvya* that was primarily invested in the production of meanings subsumable under the rubric of region was Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. In this instance of the cosmopolitan as the vernacular, Kalhaṇa elaborated the region of Kashmir via three different contexts: time, place, and identity.

The representations of these three in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* are discrete yet mutually constitutive. Time as memory is contained as well as rooted in a place, but is also what fashions a segment of space into a place, through associations and events and narratives built up over the centuries. And it is the conjunction of place and memory that produces identity and belonging, which then repose in that landscape. Further, movements across spaces and places consume and thereby compose time, and furnish the essential defining element of a region, which is the relation to other places. These are the trajectories in the emergence of Kashmir as a historical region that we have attempted to trace in this book. While history is conventionally regarded as a tale of time, I have argued that the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, displaying a complex notion of history, constructs not only the dimension of time for a place, but also a place for time. Spatiality no less than temporality together with identity are configured and articulated for Kashmir by Kalhaṇa's poem, and perhaps therein lies its iconicity.

Though each chapter of this book makes explicit its argument and its findings, let us recapitulate in this brief end-note the significant theoretical positions arrived at through our intensive engagement with this multiplex narrative. The first point is obvious: Sanskrit mediates Kashmir's rise to regionhood. The import of this is not confined to the linguistic or the literary. It is epistemic and ontological: It points to how, by all accounts and traces, the birth of Kashmir as Kashmir was performed and attended on by

Sanskritic culture. In other words, Kashmir emerges on the discursive horizons of history with self-awareness as a land and a people—in Sanskrit. So much so that till today the Kashmiri names of places in the Valley are clearly derivatives of their Sanskrit names mentioned in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* 900 years ago, displaying a remarkable persistence of culture despite the odds.[1] And Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is not even the first form this took; in what is often glossed over, the text itself names a long and like tradition of texts, also evidently in Sanskrit, that narrated the history of Kashmir and long preceded Kalhaṇa.

It may appear a bit circular to read Sanskritic cultural identity in and through a Sanskrit text, but it would be so only if we were privileging in this analysis a Sanskrit account of Kashmir over any vernacular one. The fact of the matter is that there *is* no non-Sanskrit endogenous language account of Kashmir, and not until as late as the 17th century were even Persian narrations of her history begun.[2] This tells its own tale. Almost definitely, there was no pre-existing linguistic culture in Kashmir that Sanskrit could have displaced. Of course, the adoption of literary Sanskrit by Kalhaṇa could have been on account of certain well-known aspects of the language, namely its wide reach and circulation and its prestige among subcontinental literati. However, the larger significance of this choice derives from the understanding that language is defining of the cultural values and meanings of a society. Kashmir's linguistic choice actuated a cultural choice. That is not all; it presupposed a cultural choice as well, since a linguistic representation produces culture but it is also produced by that specific culture, the world view of which infuses the representation.

The historical explanation of this foundational cultural choice—that of language and the discursive formation it signified, which are so pervasively on display in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*—lies in the fact that it was not happenstance or an isolated exercise. It can be understood against the backdrop of the intense variety of material and symbolic entanglements and connectivities that we saw between Kashmir and the rest of the Indic subcontinent from the mid-1st millennium BCE until Kalhaṇa's own time. Be it in matters of politics and war or trade and commerce or education and art or religion and philosophy. This has been obscured by the misplaced scholarly emphasis so far on early Kashmir's geographic isolation on the one hand, and her putative proclivity to non-Indic cultural influences, on the other. A realization, instead, of how situated early Kashmir was both in this vast historical network that encompassed entire India and in a more proximate regional configuration spanning the Western Himalayas and the Indus plains puts in perspective Sanskrit's role in Kashmiri history: The language appears to have been an instrument less of hegemonization and more of a shared communication.

And since the larger project of this book was to understand and unravel the character and constitution of early Kashmir as a historical culture region, perhaps the macro argument of this book would also be the one that calls for abandonment of the

essentially colonialist model of centre–periphery or its variants such as borderland and frontier, and their evolutionist conceptual adjuncts such as acculturation, to explain Kashmir's development.[3] Binaries and hierarchies are never enough to think about complex spaces, especially lived ones. A model of cultural flows is proposed in this book as the more suitable alternative. While some may argue that acculturation also entails cultural flows, the differences between the two models are several and crucial in how we understand regional process in early India. The model of cultural flows adopted in this book is polycentric and multilinear, less ingress, more infusion, spontaneous rather than orchestrated, material and ideational, arising organically over eons, and often (but not only) effected by the agency and peregrinations of non-state actors such as traders, pilgrims, scholars, settlers, and artisans pursuing non-hierarchical agendas such as commerce, education, employment, or worship. All this mobility and transfers imply a situation of overlapping communities and cultural practices.

Relatedly, the discoveries in this book advocate a need to reimagine the concept of region itself in early Indian studies. Taking a cue from contemporary cultural geography, I argue that early Kashmir presents an understanding of regions as perforated entities—nodes gathering spatial flows and connectivities that stretched far in time and space.[4] Moreover, rather than some imaginary insularity, a constitutive exteriority is prominent in early Kashmir's cultural make-up and evolution. Hardly perceived as threatening, it seems to have been inherently enabling, and Kashmiris such as Kalhaṇa wore their local and universal affiliations with no apparent discomfort or sense of dissonance. Indeed, one observes that the highly intertextual *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was in this sense a metaphor for Kashmir, since just as texts made themselves from other texts, regions could also make themselves from other regions. The local and the universal, the vernacular and the pan-Indic appear as but different registers of expression for Kashmir.

In what may be described then as a diglossic identity, the regional is hardly expropriated by the transregional. Instead, there is a need to appreciate that societies have always been constituted by their involvements in more extensive networks. And ancient regions could be just as embedded in and defined by these spatial matrices outside of themselves, and be just as cosmopolitan, as modern cities and nations without the benefit of the latter's advanced communication technologies. In Kashmir's special case, her open and dynamic character of yore stands at poignant variance from the closed and exclusionist politics of selfhood played out in recent decades.

Apart from regionality, that is, the relationship between history, space, and identity, the other relationship this study has been exemplary of is that between history and textuality. I have argued that Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* is a splendid instance of narrative as the medium, not inert receptacle, of history. It was a medium that could and

did reconfigure time, as it were. This is seen in the fact that the principle employed in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* for laying out the past was not merely linear time but also recursive time, looping around deeply ethical moments or ruptures in Kashmir's history. Kalhaṇa himself seems to have been conscious of this power to collapse centuries when appropriate, for he persistently invokes the present to prove the past and the past to dock into and historicize the present. I have argued that at the centre of his historiography and epistemology was a deep commitment to upholding a certain orthopraxis that was intertextually derived. As observed, for Kalhaṇa history did not exhaust truth; moralizing reality was more the aim. And so, historical time was a contingent exemplum of transcendent values.

Further, making this connection between the ephemeral and the eternal was the function of the poet's divine insight (*divyadṛṣṭi*). History, then, in the *kāvya* mode was but the formalization of poetic insight. Before this appears to sceptic modernists under the aspect of the arcane and the exotic, it is interesting to note that this is exactly how 19th-century Western philosophers other than Ranke, such as Hegel, Droysen, Nietzsche, and Croce also understood historiography (and without the benefit of having read the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*!)—as a part of the literary arts and grounded in poetic intuition.[5] As Northrop Frye pithily explained: 'When a historian's scheme gets to a certain point of comprehensiveness, it becomes mythical in shape, and so approaches the poetic in structure.'[6] It needs no labouring to see how well this applies to Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* as interpreted in this book. Further, we know from Claude Levi-Strauss that 'history is never simply history, always history-for, history written in the interest of some vision'.[7] In every way, then, Kalhaṇa and his ethical discourse on and for Kashmir stake a claim as legitimate as any to the title of history.

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[1] There are an infinite number of such examples. Here are a few: Baramulla (Kash.) = Varāhamūla (Skt.), Tulmul = Tulyamulya, Bijbehara = Vijbror = Vijayakṣetra, Bhutsar = Bhūteśa, Tsakdar = Cakradhara, Sopor = Suyyapura, Kanispor = Kaniṣkapura, Wular = Ullol, Harwan = Śaḍarhadvana.

[2] Sayid Muhammad Mehdi's *Baharistan i Shahi* and Haider Malik's *Tarikh I Kashmir* were composed in the first half of the seventeenth century.

[3] For a critique of the concepts of borderland and frontier for implying a colonialist exploitation by a putative Centre, see David Mullin (ed.), *Places in Between: Archaeology of Social, Cultural and Geographical Borders and Borderlands* (Oxbow Books, 2011), pp. 3–8. Perhaps the most cogent critique of cultural binaries comes from Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992) and Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Gilford Press, 1994).

[4] Ash Amin, 'Regions Unbound: Towards a New Politics of Place,' *Geografiska Annaler* 86 B, no. 1 (2004): 3–4.

[5] For details, see White, *Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 53–4.

[6] Northrop Frye, ‘New Directions from Old’, in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), pp. 53–4.

[7] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 257.

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